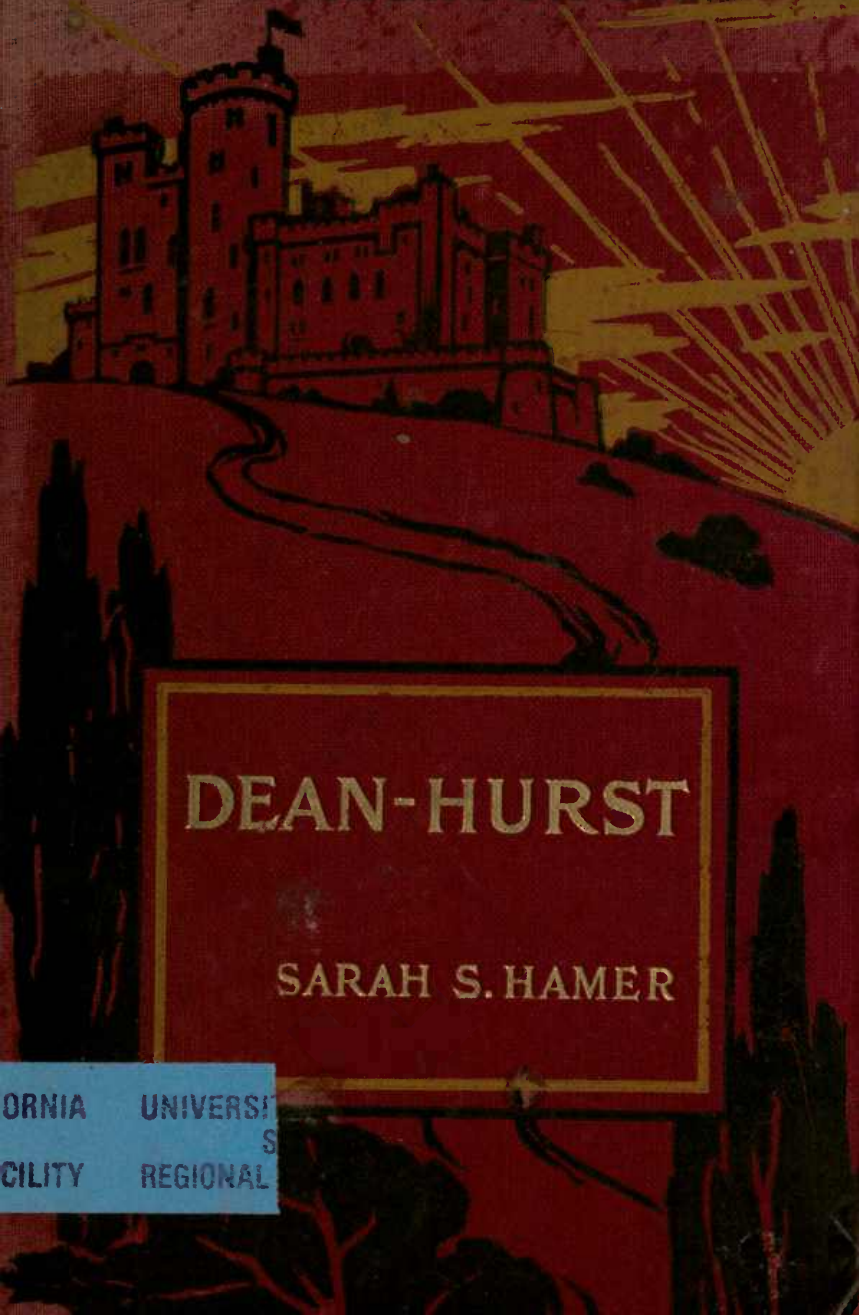


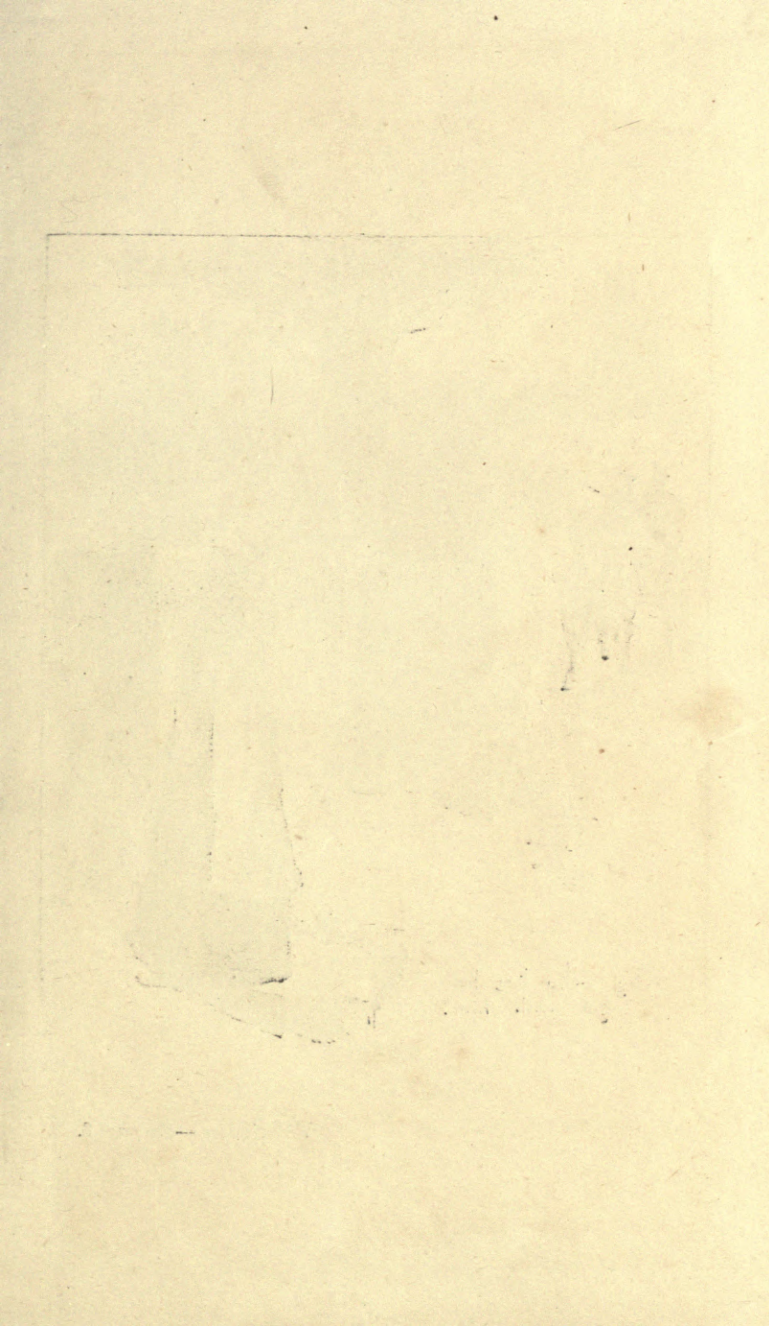
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DEAN-HURST

SARAH S. HAMER

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Why who has he
got with him?"

Frontispiece.—See page 8.

DEAN - HURST

BY

SARAH SELINA HAMER

AUTHOR OF "CHRISTINE'S CROOK"

ETC.



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DEAN-HURST



CHAPTER I

THE HOME-COMING

“All is not lost, th’ unconquerable will,
... And courage never to submit or yield.”—*Milton*.

“Beautiful as sweet !
And young as beautiful ! And soft as young !
And gay as soft ! And innocent as gay !”—*Young*.



It was the evening of a September day, and though on the hills the light still lingered, the dusk was deepening fast in Beck Dean, and other valleys which ran north and south. The mill at Higher Dean had been shut up an hour, and the hands dispersed to their homes up or down the dale or on the hillsides; the sluice or “clou” had been closed, and the full fall of the water down the weir into the beck made music in the twilight. But a woman who opened the door of the grey stone house which adjoined the grey stone mill noted it not—she was listening intently for some other sound. A

moment she stood on the threshold, then she walked the few steps down the narrow garden which ran along the front of the house and listened at the gate; and finally, hearing nothing there, she opened it, and, skirting the garden wall, stepped into the road, towards which the house had its gable-end.

"Surely Bryan cannot have missed the later train," she said, speaking to herself as she looked down the valley road; "whatever makes him so late, I wonder." She could only see a short distance,—the valley having many turnings and curves,—though her eyes looked bright enough, and keen enough almost, to pierce the intervening hill-slopes. She was a middle-aged woman, had a tall, spare figure and a remarkable face—vigour, purpose, determination were stamped upon every feature, as well as seen in the dark, keen eyes. She was plainly, almost shabbily, dressed in black.

Mrs Dean, for that was her name, lifted her firm chin, raised her right hand to her ear, and listened again. "Ah! he's coming now," she said, as the sound of wheels greeted her ears, though nothing was yet in sight; and the chin dropped, the thin lips curved into a smile, and the dark eyes softened. "It's all right, he's coming now," she repeated.

She did not re-enter the house, but waited at the angle of the garden wall. Almost instantly a one-horse gig appeared in sight, rounding a bend in the road.

"Why," she said the next moment, "who has he got with him? That's not Sam; it's a woman—or a girl."

Yes, it was a girl, unmistakably; but what girl it was too dusk to see until Bryan, her son, was drawing rein by her side.

"Do you see whom I have here?" asked the young

man, bending forward, as he brought his horse to a stand. He had to speak to his mother past his passenger, and he glanced at the latter with a smile as he spoke.

"Perhaps you are like Mr. Bryan, and don't know me again?" said the girl, bending down and holding out a small, neatly-gloved hand; "he actually passed me twice at the station without"—

"Oh yes, I know you, Miss Joyce," said Mrs. Dean, taking the girl's hand; "though you have grown and—altered, of course."

There was a certain coldness in her voice, and her grasp of the hand she had taken was not very cordial.

"Yes, I daresay; I have been away a long time," said the girl; "it has seemed long to me, at anyrate—two years and a half! And then, to think that there was not a soul to meet me! I don't know what I should have done if Mr. Bryan had not been there."

"It is as I said, no doubt," said the young man; "they can't have got your letter up at the Manse, Miss Joyce; letters are behind sometimes—in Beck Dean, at anyrate. But you are all right; I shall soon have you at Dean Head;" and as he spoke, Bryan Dean tightened his grasp of the reins and intimated to Boxer, by means of an unspellable sound, that he might go on.

"Good-night, Mrs. Dean," said the girl, as that lady stepped back and the gig started again. "Tell Zillah I shall come to see her very soon; she is not in, I suppose?"

"I shall not be long, mother," called back Bryan; and then the gig gradually disappeared in the gathering gloom.

Mrs. Dean stood perfectly still, until it could be neither seen nor heard. Then, with compressed lips, she re-entered

the house, turning as she did so into the left-hand parlour—there was one each side the door, in the good old-fashioned Stonyshire style. In the firelight the room looked comfortable; but a stronger light would have revealed the fact that the carpet was threadbare, the crimson moreen curtains faded and shabby, and the beautifully white cloth on the table, spread for Bryan's tea, much darned. To make use of a catch phrase, often repeated in our childhood's days, there was no "abundance on the table." There was plenty of bright silver, which was ornamented with a crest, and some choice old china; but very little, and very plain, food.

Mrs. Dean seated herself in a low rocking-chair to the left of the fire, and took up some knitting she had put aside when she went out; but she soon let it drop on her lap and gazed into the fire, the expression of her face becoming every moment more grim.

"Come to see Zillah, will she?" she repeated to herself more than once; "I think not—I must see that that friendship is not renewed. I'll not have her coming here; I will *not*."

The door opened, and a middle-aged servant-woman appeared, carrying a lighted lamp.

"You shouldn't have lit that yet, Rebecca," said her mistress rather sharply.

"Why, I thought I heard th' gig an' as mather 'ould be in any minute," said the woman, setting down the lamp.

"So you did hear it," said Mrs. Dean; "but Mr. Bryan has gone on to Dean Head with Joyce Warwick; he met with her at the station. There ought to have been somebody to meet her, but, with their usual bungling ways, there wasn't."

‘Just like them,” said Rebecca with a sniff, and lowering the light in the lamp.

“Of course your master could do no other than drive her home, under the circumstances ; but—I don’t like it.”

Mrs. Dean’s tone was low but emphatic.

The servant-woman stood by the table, and looked at her mistress intently.

“Why,” she said, “she’s only a bit of a child.”

“Child?” echoed Mrs. Dean ; “you should see her, Rebecca. You forget what two or three years does for a girl of fifteen.”

“Why, what is she like now then, mistress?” asked Rebecca, drawing nearer the hearth ; “she was plain enough as a little lass.”

“She’s grown from a plain girl into a beautiful young lady—there’s no denying the fact. And Mr. Bryan is quite taken with her ; I saw it by the way he looked at her ; it is no use denying that either—it will have to be faced.”

“Mistress !” cried Rebecca, with a world of meaning in the expression.

“It is true,” said Mrs. Dean, looking sternly in the fire.

“And you think she’ll spoil everything ?” asked the woman, dropping on her knees on the hearthrug and looking up in her mistress’ face.

“I do not think so,” said Mrs. Dean sharply ; “she must not—she shall not ; but it will take all our wits—yours and mine, Rebecca—to prevent it.”

The woman’s face, which was plain almost to ugliness, lit up at the expression “yours and mine.” It had been purposely used ; it strengthened the bond between them—a strong bond of very many years’ standing.

"Nothing on earth must be allowed to interfere with *that*," continued the mistress.

The servant nodded her head, which was adorned (?) with an ugly black cap, two or three times, and looked again up in her mistress' face. In the firelight it looked like bronze in colour, and as hard and fixed as a face in that metal. But even as she looked the expression relaxed, and the face became troubled.

"All was going so well," she said bitterly; "Miss Zillah and Miss Whaite becoming fast friends, and Miss Whaite ready to— Oh, I cannot bear to think of it!" she cried, springing up from her seat.

Rebecca sprang up too. "Nay, nay, mistress," she said, venturing to touch Mrs. Dean's arm; "aren't yo' frightened too soon? Why, there's many a bonnier lass than Miss Joyce *can* be as goes to Dean Head Chapel,—there's Miss Warwick, for one,—an' Mr. Bryan takes no more notice of 'em than if they was so many crow-boggarts; an' why should he"—

"There is no 'why' or 'wherefore' in these things, Rebecca," interrupted Mrs. Dean grimly; "and I tell you I saw it in him."

"Well," said Rebecca musingly, "even if it should be so, there's t' way we've thought on all along, t' old way left."

"The old way," said Mrs. Dean contemptuously; "we should each have one foot, if not both feet, in the grave before we reached the goal that way, and I am more and more persuaded of that. There is always something happening to run away with the savings—a fire, or a flood, or a bad spell of trade."

"Then," said Rebecca, "is all our 'nippin' ways,' as my sister Marinda calls 'em, of no good at all, mistress?"

"Nay, I didn't say so," said Mrs. Dean, in a tone of alarm; we must go on save, save, saving just the same; the money *may* be wanted in any case—for fathers are not always like daughters—there must be no relaxation in that."

"I understand, mistress," said Rebecca, stooping to pick up a fallen cinder and putting it back on the fire, which sadly wanted stirring and a little more coal on.

"This is a misfortune which has happened," said Mrs. Dean, summing up as it were; "but, as I said before, it must and shall be met. We must get Miss Zillah on our side, if possible, and then we shall easily manage to keep Miss Joyce out of the house at anyrate; and, thank goodness, she has no grown-up brothers—there will be no excuse for master's going to the Manse."

"Chapel House, I call 'it," said Rebecca. "I make nothin' o' yo'r newfangled names."

"Call it what you like, so that you keep Miss Joyce in it and Mr. Bryan out of it," said Mrs. Dean.

Rebecca laughed, a harsh, discordant laugh, and went her way into the kitchen. Her mistress sat down in the dark, until she again heard the sound of wheels; then she sprang up, applied the poker to the fire, and made a ruddy blaze, turned up the light in the lamp, and went again to the door to meet her son.

"Sam is just in time," he said, as he strode into the light; "he has had to come on 'shanks' Galloway,' as he calls it, and I hardly expected him yet. I thought I should have had to take Boxer out myself."

"Was there no cab to be had at Beckfoot?" asked Mrs. Dean, in a manner which she strove to make appear off-hand.

"There was none at the station," said Bryan; "at

least there had been one, Miss Joyce said, but it was hired and away before she knew there was no one to meet her."

"There ought to have been someone there," said Mrs. Dean, not quite able to hide her irritation. "They are such blundering people at the Manse."

"Mother!" expostulated Bryan. Then, seating himself, he went on quietly, "It was as I thought: they had not received her letter giving the time she would arrive."

"She did not post it in time, I'll be bound."

"I don't know about that," said Bryan, stooping to unfasten his shoes.

"It's no use your troubling to unlace those, Bryan," said his mother: "you'll have Zillah to fetch home from Undercragg."

"Zillah at Undercragg again!" exclaimed Bryan, raising his body and his eyebrows at the same time. "Why, isn't this the third time this week?"

"Yes," said his mother; "and Agatha Whaite would have her there every day of the week if she had her mind—or be here," she added, as an afterthought.

"That friendship is too hot to last, I should say," said Bryan with a smile. "Besides," he went on, with another smile and rising to his feet, "Zillah won't have time to go there so much now that her old friend Joyce Warwick has come back."

"When friendships are once broken off, it does not follow they will ever be renewed," said Mrs. Dean coldly.

"I wasn't aware theirs ever had been broken off," said Bryan in a surprised tone. "Zillah and—Joyce never quarrelled, did they?"

"Not that I know of," said Mrs. Dean, as if it were a matter of no importance of which she were speaking,

instead of one almost of life and death ; “ but they were children before, now they are both grown up. Zillah has other friends, and I daresay Miss Joyce has also.”

“ But she’s not one to forget old friends, for all that,” said Bryan ; “ she’s been talking a good deal about Zillah.”

“ Has she ? ” said Mrs. Dean drily. “ Well, never mind ; here’s Rebecca with the teapot.”

“ I’ll be down in a minute,” said Bryan, rushing out of the room and upstairs to wash his hands.

Rebecca stopped at the parlour door and watched him.

“ I know now as somethin’s up,” she said to her mistress, coming forward and putting down the teapot with a bang.

“ Why, how so ? ” asked Mrs. Dean.

“ He’s gone upstairs three steps at a time,” said Rebecca.

Mrs. Dean’s thin lips relaxed, and she actually laughed.

“ How absurd you are, Rebecca ! ” she exclaimed.

“ Well, mistress, yo’ say yo’ know by one thing, an’ I say I know by another ; an’ I say again, somethin’s up wi’ t’ young masther ; he’s niver gone upstairs three at a time sin’ he was a lad, and he niver did it then except when somethin’d pleased him special, sich as when he’d got a new toy-machine or a prize at school, or he’d licked a big lad for abusin’ a little un—I know.”

“ Hush ! he’s coming,” said Mrs. Dean.

Whereupon Rebecca discreetly retired into the kitchen, muttering to herself, “ Mistress is right ; I thought she couldn’t be, but I know it for myself now.”

Bryan Dean re-entered the room, glanced at the table as he seated himself thereat, and said, but quite good-humouredly—

"I'm more than bread-and-butter hungry, mother."

Mrs. Dean smiled, and pulled the bell-rope by her side ; and when, in response, Rebecca reappeared and she was told to bring the cold joint, that domestic raised her eyebrows a little.

Bryan cut himself a very modest portion, and when, by and by, he seemed to be contemplating a second helping, he glanced at his mother.

"Has this to do for to-morrow's dinner?" he asked, turning his regards again to the remains of the leg of mutton.

"Certainly," said Mrs. Dean.

And Bryan thereupon laid down the carver without another word ; neither, indeed, spoke again for the space of three minutes. Then the mother broke the silence.

"This pinching need not last very long," she said, "if you will be wise, Bryan, and act upon the hint I gave you a week or two since. I am more and more convinced that I am right. It's not Zillah that Agatha Whaite wants—it's yourself ; there now, that's plain speaking."

"I think it is, mother, with a vengeance," said the son, putting aside his plate ; "and I don't think you have any right to speak so—it doesn't seem nice."

Mrs. Dean frowned as she replied—

"I don't think it is nice, Bryan, for you to answer me so."

"I'm sure I beg your pardon, mother, if I have vexed you," said Bryan in a softer tone ; "but really"—

"If I were not speaking and acting entirely for your own good, and for the one object of your life and mine, it would be different," said Mrs. Dean ; "but when I am showing you a good way—an easy way—to our goal, and happiness for yourself and someone else besides, not to mention myself,—and surely you might consider

me a little after all my self-denial,—for you to turn round and say it is not nice”—

Bryan Dean pushed his chair back, rose from it, and went and stood on the hearth-rug before his mother.

“I did not mean to vex you ; you know I did not ; I”—

“Well then,” she said, “will you promise me to notice for yourself, and if you find my words are true, to act accordingly ?”

“Irrespective of my own feelings ?” asked Bryan Dean.

“Feelings can be cherished and controlled, like other things,” said Mrs. Dean ; “and if you wish to care for Agatha Whaite, you can do so.”

“Rather a new doctrine that, isn’t it ?” asked Bryan with a laugh.

“Nothing of the kind,” said his mother. “It’s one that people are acting upon every day, with not half the need that you have.”

Bryan did not reply, but dropped into the arm-chair on the opposite side of the fireplace.

Looking first at one and then at the other, you could see what a strong likeness there was between the two faces, and yet how, in many ways, they differed. Mother and son had the same finely-moulded firm chin, the same broad brow, the same contour of cheek ; but the son’s mouth was more mobile, his nose was straight, not aquiline, and his eyes, though dark, beamed with a kindlier light. Like his mother, he was tall and thin in figure, but he had a good breadth of shoulder, and his form was well-knit. Altogether, Bryan Dean was such a son as any mother might well be proud to look upon. And when Mrs. Dean could not only say of him, as

she now often said, "He's a real Dean," but could add, "and he is a Dean of Dean-Hurst," she felt that life could give her no more satisfaction.

"I'm tired to - night," said Bryan, shelving the subject of discussion; "I wish I hadn't to go out again," and he crossed his legs, pushed his hand amongst his dark locks, and gazed into the fire.

Mrs. Dean was not pleased at this wish, seeing that Bryan's destination was Undercragg, and that going thither he would see Agatha Whaite. She thought it wiser to say nothing, however, and only the click of the knitting-needles broke the silence, for Bryan had fallen to musing. What did he see amongst the dully-glowing coals which brought that smile to his face by and by? Was it Joyce Warwick he was thinking of? his mother wondered; and her thin lips drew together tightly, and her eyebrows knit.

Mrs. Dean was not far wrong. Bryan was back in thought at Beckfoot Station, and the little scene of an hour or two before was being re-enacted. First, his noticing a young girl—a stranger, as he thought—a girl with such a sweet, attractive face, that, with no need whatever to go again in her direction, he had been impelled to do so, that he might, in passing, enjoy another look. But it was what had happened next which brought the smile of pleasure as he recalled it. For, suddenly, the stranger had hurried towards him; with both hands outstretched, which he had taken in his of course—he seemed still to feel their touch—and with a joyous exclamation had addressed him—

"Mr. Bryan Dean! I thought it was you when you passed before, but you were a little too far away, and I wasn't quite sure. Oh, how good it is to see a familiar

face! But you have forgotten me, I see—you have quite forgotten little Joyce Warwick."

"Little Joyce Warwick!" exclaimed Bryan.

"Yes," laughed the girl, enjoying his astonishment.

"I am not so very little now, am I?"

"No," said Bryan. "You have grown from a child into a"—he had almost said "beautiful woman," but he stopped himself.

Also, quite unconsciously, the girl interrupted him. "Isn't it too bad!" she said, "there is not a soul here to meet me that I can find."

And then Bryan had, of course, offered to take her in charge, and, after arranging to send down for her luggage the following morning, had driven away with her up Beck Dean—she almost wild with delight at her home-coming one minute, and almost in tears the next at the apparent neglect of her friends. She had left Brussels a month ago, she told Bryan, but had been staying in Lincolnshire with two schoolfellows with whom she had journeyed to England.

"And oh, it is so good to see the hills again!" said Joyce enthusiastically. "For in Lincolnshire, as in Belgium, the country just looks as if it had been ironed out flat."

Bryan had laughed at that, and then Joyce had laughed—laughter is contagious—the most musical laugh possible. Joyce had had a great many eager questions to ask too, about her father and the rest of the family at the Manse, and about Bryan's mother and his sister Zillah.

Altogether that drive had been a very pleasant experience; and as Bryan Dean put on his hat, and went down the Dean to fetch home the said Zillah, he was thinking more of her old friend than her new one.



CHAPTER II

DEAN HEAD MANSE

“Hailed the bright promise of your early day!”—*Heber*.

“ Affectionate in look !

And tender in address ! as well becomes

A messenger of grace to guilty men !”—*Cowper*.



THE Rev. William Warwick was one of those men, not unfrequently met with, whose career is a disappointment to their friends. A member of a refined Nonconformist family in a good position, he had received a high-class education, had graduated with honours at Cambridge, and had commenced his ministerial career with every promise of—to use a common expression—“making his mark” in the ministerial world. The first church to which he had been called was in a pleasant suburb of London ; and there for a time his sermons, well-studied and given forth with a natural eloquence, were listened to by ever-increasing numbers. But by and by had come a change. A severe illness attacked the minister, leaving him slightly deaf and with a delicate throat. His mental powers, too, either were, or one or two of his deacons thought they were, slightly impaired, and “a

decided check" was felt to have been given to the prosperity of the church—at least so said the before-mentioned deacons. It took no very long time for these sayings to reach the minister's ears, and, sensitive to the core, and shrinking more and more within himself as the breath of disfavour blew upon him, Mr. Warwick eventually felt his position untenable, and resigned the pastorate he had entered upon with so much promise.

During the time that his star had been in the ascendant, Mr. Warwick had married a young lady who was a member of a neighbouring church. She had been as much flattered by his selection of her, in preference to any of the young ladies in his own congregation, as won by his love; and in marrying him, expected for him and herself as brilliant a future as is possible for a Nonconformist minister and his wife. It was a sad blow to her therefore, when, half a dozen years later, the clouds of adversity, gathering for some time, thus culminated; and it was with a very discontented mind that she, with her two baby-girls, accompanied her husband to his new charge in a Northern provincial town. Discontent is a very poor helper, and the minister had all his own burdens to carry and his wife's also. He was as much disappointed with himself as, he felt, she was disappointed in him; and this fact, together with his naturally sweet temper and benevolent disposition, made Mr. Warwick very tender with his wife, and very tolerant of her grumblings. Moreover, his deafness had grown upon him, and he did not hear half of them.

Ten years before our story opens, Mr. Warwick, after another long spell of illness, had left the town and had accepted the charge of a country church in an adjoining county. Here he had become more and more of the

recluse and student—neglecting no duty, visiting the sick and his scattered members with regularity and a true interest in his work, but seeing no other society, and finding his solace and companionship in books. Of course the minister had his family, four children living, two lying in the chapel-yard ; but he had never been in the habit of spending much time with them, partly owing to the unfortunate deafness of which we have spoken. Still, he loved them dearly, and often he had resolved to make them his more constant companions ; but they had their mother, and to be with her very much was to him only a pain, and to her he felt that his society was no great pleasure, so his resolves had melted, and old habit had hardened.

But the presence of Joyce, back from Brussels, where an aunt had sent her to finish her education, and especially to perfect herself in French, was like daily sunshine, in which resolves could grow again ; indeed, in which they sprang spontaneously, and blossomed into wishes. And she was not only like sunshine, with her pretty, loving, bright ways, but like a fresh breeze in the house, with her happy spirits and her active movements. Maud, the elder daughter, infused with a degree of her mother's discontent, and having, besides, a proud nature, inherited from her, and a reserved one, transmitted from her father, was stately in appearance, and quiet in manner and speech ; but Joyce was quick both to feel and speak, and though there might come a time when proof would not be wanting that Joyce could both feel deeply and hide her feelings, that time had not yet arrived. The girl's home-affections were strong, and long separation from her kinsfolk (the distance having prevented her return even for the holidays) had made the reunion with them a very

joyful thing to her; and no one at the Manse could pull a very long face, for the first few days at anyrate, after Joyce's return. Jack and Jill, the two younger ones, otherwise John and Julia, were in the seventh heaven, and dragged Joyce hither and thither at their own sweet will; and Mr. Warwick felt that he could not cross Cowley Common, or mount on to Royden Edge, in pursuit of his calling, or for exercise, without asking Joyce to put on her hat and go with him. Often the two little ones—Jack was nine, and Jill eight—would clamour to accompany them; and so it came to pass that the unprecedented spectacle was to be seen of the grave minister of Dean Head tramping the country with three of his children at his heels.

"I rayther doubtedt myself, Mester Warwick, about this sendin' Miss Joyce to fureign parts," said old Ezra Whixley, the handloom weaver who lived on the Common; "but they hannot spoiled her one bit; she's t' same lass as she went, only bigger an' bonnier."

And the sick woman on Royden Edge said "the very sight of her" had done her good.

Joyce Warwick was indeed comely to look upon. She had one of those faces the secret of whose charm is indescribable, even when all its good points are told. Her complexion was not specially good,—she was neither a blonde nor a brunette,—her hair was brown, neither very light nor very dark, but it was abundant, very glossy, and slightly curly. Her nose was the least bit *retroussé*, and it seemed to suit her face. She had a charming mouth, pearly white teeth, and clear, frank, dark-blue eyes, deeply fringed with lashes several shades darker than her hair. But perhaps, more than in all else, the attraction lay in the ever-changing expression of the face, and

the light of the loving human soul which looked out of the eyes.

Though she was no longer, as she had said to Bryan Dean, "little Joyce Warwick," she was not by any means tall,—being rather below the middle height,—and was as slim and trim in figure as a girl still under eighteen ought to be.

"I wonder why Zillah Dean does not come to see me," said Joyce to her sister Maud.

It was on the Saturday, in the afternoon,—she had returned on the Tuesday,—and the two were seated with some sewing-work, at the front window of the family sitting-room at the Manse or Chapel House.

"I did say to Mr. Bryan that I would call to see her," continued Joyce; "but when I mentioned it to mamma, she said that of course it was Zillah's place to come to see me first."

"Mamma was quite right," said Maud in her slow, stately way.

"But if we keep waiting for each other," said Joyce; "and I did say I would go—and Zillah may think it unkind—and what do formalities matter between old friends?"

"You are not expecting to find Zillah just the same as you left her, are you, Joyce?" said Maud; "because if you are, you'll be disappointed. She's more 'grown-up' than you, and she has struck up a great friendship with that rich Miss Whaite."

"Who is Miss Whaite?" asked Joyce.

"Oh, let me see—they have come to live at Undercragg while you have been away; but you remember their mills—Lower Dean Mills?"

"Oh, they are Mr. Whaite's, are they?" said Joyce.

"Yes; he had them long before we came here; but he lived near some of his other mills until about two years ago."

"Do the Whaites come to chapel?" asked Joyce.

"No; they go to church," said Maud; "but Miss Whaite often comes with Zillah."

"And you say Miss Whaite and Zillah are great friends; how has that come about?"

"Oh, I think they met at some non-sectarian bazaar," said Maud, in a tone which plainly indicated that she thought the matter hardly worth discussion.

"Well," said Joyce brightly, "I am not going to be jealous—it is possible to have more than one friend; and though Zillah only wrote to me twice,—I believe because she hates writing letters so,—I feel sure we shall still be friends. But, Maud," she added, "just look at the clock. I must put on my hat this minute, and go and meet papa and the children."

Joyce's wardrobe was not in very good order, and, as the morrow was Sunday, she had been compelled to stay indoors to execute repairs; but had promised her father to meet him on his return from Cowley. This she now set out to do. Joyce had barely let the garden-gate clang to, however, and turned to the left towards Cowley Common, when she heard her name called, and turning her head in the opposite direction, she saw two figures—those of Bryan Dean and his sister.

With swift feet, Joyce ran down the road to meet them.

"Zillah!" she cried, with both hands outstretched as she reached the girl.

Zillah put out one, looked, or tried to look, very proper and young-ladyish, but glanced at Joyce's face and then out came the other.

"O Zillah, I am glad to see you," cried Joyce, kissing her on both cheeks; "and you are going to stay tea, are you not—and you, too, Mr. Bryan?" and she shook hands with him. "But I promised papa to meet him on his way back from old Ezra Whixley's, and I am rather late as it is. Will you go in and see mamma and Maud, or will you come with me?"

"Oh, I should like a walk on the Common immensely," said Bryan; "and so would you, Zillah, wouldn't you?" he continued, turning to his sister.

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Zillah doubtfully. "Shall we have time? Mother said I wasn't to stay to tea."

"Oh, that is a pity," said Joyce; "but, anyhow, you can turn with me, and come a little way."

So the three passed the garden-gate of the Manse, and took the rough cart-track skirting the wood on the right, and steeply rising to Cowley Common.

"Let me look at you," said Joyce, passing her arm through Zillah's. "Oh, you are the same little gipsy, I see, though you are grown-up and pretend to look very proper."

"It's a very thin covering of starch, I assure you," said Bryan, laughing. "You'll soon break through it, Miss Joyce, and teach her better than putting it on."

Zillah drew herself up a little, and Joyce felt her stiffen herself.

"Oh, I shall not teach Zillah anything of the kind," Joyce laughed. "She'll have to teach me instead. Mamma says my manners 'lack repose,' and Maud thinks the same."

"Oh, for pity's sake," cried Bryan, "don't learn that lesson—don't put on veneer—just be yourself, Miss Joyce."

"Well," said Joyce laughingly, "I'm afraid I should find it difficult to be very prim, especially while I am feeling so glad."

"I hope that feeling will last," said Bryan, his own feeling that of gladness also as he trod the rough road by Joyce's side.

"I don't know," said Joyce, glancing on her other hand at Zillah; "I am afraid I am going to suffer awfully from jealousy—the green-eyed monster. I am told of a certain Miss Whaite, who is supposed to have stolen Zillah's affections from me."

"O Joyce," said Zillah, who was every moment falling more into the old enchantment of her friend's presence, "who has been saying such a thing?"

"Never mind that," said Joyce, "so that you can contradict it."

"Well, of course," said Zillah, "Agatha Whaite is a friend of mine; that is true enough; but"—And here Zillah stopped, suddenly remembering a warning of her mother's.

"Zillah means to say," put in Bryan, "that in making a new friend, she has not cast off the old."

Joyce rewarded him with a grateful look, while Zillah barely acknowledged the sentiment her brother had spoken on her behalf.

They walked on, Joyce recalling to Zillah's recollection various escapades of their childhood's days, during bramble and bilberry gatherings, wadings through the becks, jumping from one "hippin" to another, etc.

"I cannot imagine," said Joyce, after they had laughed over one little experience and another; "I cannot imagine a more delightful neighbourhood in which to spend one's childhood than this is."

The question trembled on Bryan's tongue : "And how about the rest of life ?" And though he did not give utterance to it, it lodged in his mind, and brought some other thoughts in its train which were, to say the least of it, troublesome and inconvenient, if pleasurable in a sense.

The laughter had cracked Zillah's starch more than anything else could have done ; but all at once she suddenly stiffened again, and remembered that she "must go home."

"But you cannot turn back, so near papa and the children," said Joyce. "See, there they are coming."

A minute afterwards, two little figures were seen to be tearing headlong towards them ; they came too fast, however and, one after the other, they fell down on the grass.

"Jack fell down and broke his—stick," cried Joyce, "and Jill came tumbling after."

Jack was up again in a moment, gazing ruefully at his stick in two parts ; but poor little Jill lay still, and began to cry.

Swift as the wind flew Joyce to her little sister's help, and raised her, or rather attempted to do so, for the child could not stand.

"Oh, my ankle, my ankle !" she cried.

"She has sprained it, I fear," said Bryan, who had come up. "Never mind, dear," he said ; "I will carry you." And he took her up in his strong arms.

"But I want Joyce !" cried the child.

"Oh, Joyce will walk close to you," said the girl. "But," turning to Bryan, "will she not be too heavy for you ?"

"Not at all," said the young man.

And just then Mr. Warwick coming up, greetings were exchanged, and they all set their faces towards the Manse, Joyce keeping her promise, and walking close to Jill, consequently close to Bryan. She little knew what mischief she was doing, nor how every step weakened Bryan's power of resistance to the spell she was casting over him. Every upward look of hers into her little sister's face, every encouraging word, every ripple of laughter helped in Bryan's undoing.

Zillah walked behind with Mr. Warwick, and wondered what her mother would think if she saw the two in front; for in giving Zillah permission to go to the Manse, which she had done in order to prevent Joyce's coming to Higher Dean, she had taken her into her confidence to some extent, and had told her that Joyce's coming home might ruin everything, if care were not taken.

"So you must go to-day," she had said, "while Bryan is at Greenroyd; and you are not to stay to tea, and you are not to ask Joyce to come 'any time,' but say you will let her know what day she is to come."

For Mrs. Dean had reflected that it would never do, after all, to attempt to keep Joyce entirely at arm's length—she might do more harm than good if she roused Bryan's combative faculties—so she would manage to have her there occasionally, when Bryan was away on business.

But whatever might become of other days, her arrangements for this day had gone wrong, for Bryan's business was soon done, and, instead of coming back by train, he had walked over Royden Edge, and had dropped down the hillside into Beck Dean, almost at Zillah's feet, about a quarter of a mile above Higher Dean, and, with rather

unusual brotherly attention, had announced his purpose of accompanying her on her walk. Zillah had thereupon made know the purpose of her expedition, and told him flatly she would not have him; whereupon, in his turn, Bryan had announced that if he might not accompany Zillah to the Manse, neither would he, on another occasion, accompany her to Undercragg, or fetch her therefrom. And at this threat Zillah had given in, and things had turned out even worse than she could possibly have thought of; and now, to crown all, rain was coming on, and she had no cloak, and she would be obliged to call at the Manse—a little while, at anyrate, until the shower was over.

“I think you and Miss Joyce had better run on, out of the rain, Zillah,” said Bryan, with great self-denial. To tell the truth, he was finding Jill rather heavy, now he had carried her nearly a mile, and he could not walk more quickly himself.

“You will be all right, Jill; you will be home directly,” said Joyce, preparing to follow Bryan’s advice. But Jill began to cry, and Zillah had to run on with Jack for company; and Mr. Warwick, too, got a little in front; and Bryan, except the child in his arms, had Joyce all to himself for a little space, and, notwithstanding the rain, he lingered. Yes, Jill was decidedly heavy.

Tea was ready, and looked very inviting, when the party gained the Manse; and as the rain still poured down, there was nothing for it but to accept the minister’s hospitality; indeed, Bryan had got so far that he inwardly blessed the rain.

Good housewifery is much thought of in the county of Stonyshire, and in that part of it particularly where Beck Dean is situated, and Mrs. Warwick’s “ways” had



Jill was
decidedly heavy.

on her first arrival been much criticised. It was soon known throughout the community how often the bedrooms were "turned out," and in what way; on which day the washing was done, and how long the clothes "were about," etc., and the verdict was—general disapproval.

"They know nothin' about followin' a house, down i' t' south," said one good woman; "leastways, so they tell me—I've never been myself, but if yo may judge by those 'at comes."

"Well, I have," said another Dean Headite, who was her auditor, and speaking very emphatically; "and it seems to me that cleaning, London way, is never anything but a 'lick and a promise,' as my mother used to say."

"I wonder how they can abide," said the first speaker, "such shiftless work!"

The household management at the Manse was still talked of sometimes; but, following a law which seems to be at work in all departments of life, it had to some extent adapted itself to its environment, and the washing was by this time generally done on the same day as other folk's, and the carpets were taken up oftener, and the baking was done at home. Many had been the strictures on the minister's family living on "bought bread"; and great interest was taken in the fact, when it was known for the first time, that a load of flour had been ordered and taken to the "Chapel House." Reports certainly leaked out, afterwards, of blocks of some heavy substance, which ought to have been bread, having been thrown out, and of the minister having a severe fit of indigestion; but then everything worth anything must have a beginning.

To-night there was sweet, light household bread on the

tea-table at the Manse, at whose production Mrs. Warwick had herself assisted, though she always averred that baking-day half-killed her. And there were home-preserved fruits and salad, and a dish of new-laid eggs ; and, for ornament, a bowl of chrysanthemums which had grown in a sheltered nook of the minister's garden, and which Joyce had gathered.

Joyce was so happy, and enjoyed herself so much, that her spirits affected even the gravest amongst the party ; and if it be true that laughter aids digestion, the food taken around that tea-table must have been easily assimilated.

Towards the end of the meal, a thought occurring to Bryan, he turned to the minister and asked—

“By the way, Mr. Warwick, has application been made yet about the new lease?”

“Yes, the agent has been seen,” said the minister, “but”—and then he paused. “If you will come into my study, after tea,” he went on, the next minute, “I will tell you about it, Mr. Bryan.” And after a little chat by the fire, Bryan followed the minister into his sanctum.

“Ah, you have come to hear about the lease,” said Mr. Warwick, glancing round to see that the door was closed. “I don't want to make my wife uneasy, and, so far, I think she knows nothing about this unfortunate business. Mr. Sowcroft refuses to renew the lease, except upon terms which our deacons find it impossible to accept. It really seems as if he wished to turn us out of the premises.”

“That is very unfortunate,” said Bryan ; “but surely he can hardly wish that, if only for his own sake, or Captain Crimsworth's. What good would the chapel and manse be to him, left empty?”

"No good, that I can see," said the minister; "but neither greed nor prejudice argues that way—and he thinks he has us in his power."

"He is a Churchman, of course," said Bryan, "and so is his master; but only in name, I should say, from all I hear of him."

"And he is a spendthrift, and wants all he can get, I suppose," said the minister. "I understand his property is nearly all mortgaged up to the hilt—your old place included, Mr. Bryan."

"Yes," said Bryan with a sigh, and a thought of his mother; "Mr. Whaite holds the mortgage on Dean-Hurst."

"So I understand," said Mr. Warwick; adding, as he looked admiringly on Bryan, "If justice were poetic, you ought to hold it, and—foreclose."

"Yes," said Bryan, "it is the ambition of my life to get back that old family property, and my mother is even more bent upon it than I am."

"How long have the Crimsworths held it?" asked the minister, stirring up his fire.

"Oh," said Bryan, "nearly a hundred years, I should say. It was my great-grandfather who let it go."

"He was a spendthrift, I presume," said the minister, holding up his thin white hands to the blaze.

"Yes," said Bryan; "mortgaged the property in his young days; and when he was old, the Crimsworths foreclosed. And since then we have always been poor," added Bryan mournfully.

"'The sins of the fathers'—the old law," murmured the minister.

"It seems a cruel one," said Bryan.

"It is inevitable," said the minister; "effects must proceed from causes. God must be continually working

miracles, otherwise. If men would only look this law in the face, and square their lives by it, we should have fewer mischiefs done, fewer spoilt lives and impoverished families. But men go blindly on, leaving things to chance; and"— But the minister stopped with a smile, and then said—

"It is not Sunday yet, Mr. Bryan, and still I am preaching you a sermon—one you do not need, either, for you are not one of the reckless kind. And you have a purpose in life—and that is what few men have—and one which is commendable, so that it can be honourably achieved, though our life does not consist in the abundance of the things which we possess. It is well for some of us that it is so," said the minister with another smile, glancing round at his barely-furnished study. "About the lease we were speaking of," he added; "our deacons mean to see Captain Crimsworth himself, when he returns from abroad, and it is to be hoped something will be done then."

Bryan echoed the hope, and the two had begun to talk of something else when there was a knock at the study door, followed by the entrance of Joyce.

"I don't know what makes Zillah so fidgety, Mr. Bryan," she said; "but I can't keep her another minute, now the rain is over; she is now putting on her hat to go home."

"Then I must needs put on mine, I suppose," said Bryan, rising.

And in a few more minutes the brother and sister were on their way down the valley—Zillah very sulky, thinking of her probable scolding, and Bryan wishing, somehow, that he had not told the minister of his ambition.



CHAPTER III

“DEAN HEAD CHAPEL” AND “DEAN-HURST”

“We who are not ethereal creatures, but of mixed and diverse nature ; we who, when we look our clearest towards the skies, must still have our standing-ground of earth secure—it is strange what relations of personal love we enter into with the scenes of this lower sphere.”—*Washington Irving*.

“There is no man who has not some interesting associations with particular scenes.”—*Alison*.

“To love the little platoon we belong to in society is the germ of all public affections.”—*Charles Lamb*.

DEAN HEAD CHAPEL had been built for the accommodation of a widely-scattered district, at that time—nearly ninety-nine years before the time of our story—only sparsely populated too. It had taken the place of one still more remote from the common haunts of men, and had been placed near the head of the valley or dean, at a time when men were beginning to take advantage of the power which water could give them, and were erecting mills on the banks of the beck which ran through it.

Ninety-nine years seems a long time, looking forward, and doubtless the promoters of the chapel-building

thought they might well leave the future beyond that to their posterity when they accepted a lease for that period. But, one by one, the years of the then future had been added to the years of the past, and now the last one of the ninety and nine had been entered upon, and "posterity" dubbed it a foolish thing which their ancestors had done, in erecting good buildings on so short a lease.

"Nine hundred and ninety-nine, it had ought to have been," said Ambrose Widdop, a small farmer of Royden Edge, west of Beck Dean, and one of the oldest deacons at Dean Head. "Yo' wouldn't find me hardly puttin' up a mistle, niver name a chapel, upon a short lease."

"'Appen they couldn't get a long 'un," remarked his hearer; "i' those days, I dar'say, folk didn't get a' they wanted, no more than they do now."

"Well, I'd ha'e built somewhere else then," said Farmer Widdop. Ninety-nine year! Why, it is nothin', in a way o' speakin'."

"Well, as however it be, Ambrose, it's varry near spun out," said the other, "an' unless it's renewed, an' that varry soon, we'st be in a fix."

"Somebody 'll ha'e to go to th' fountain-head," said Mr. Widdop, "nob'dy can do a bit o' good wi' th' agent. They're like as if they have no conscience, hasn't agents; there's no gettin' houd on 'em, no road. If yo' tell 'em they're hard, they'll tell yo' straight out as they're only doin' their duty to their maisters. An' they stop your mouth that road. Somebody'll ha'e to go to th' fountain-head, I tell yo', an' I think it had t' best be our parson. He looks like an owd duke, I al'ays say—an' looks count for som'hat, especially wi' t' quality. Look at him now."

The speakers were in the chapel-yard, for service was



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Why, it's nothin'
in a way ospeakini."

just over, and, as is common where a congregation is gathered from several directions, there were friendly greetings and a little gossip going on. Joyce was being heartily greeted by one and another, and many were the comments upon her appearance, both to her face and "behind her back." Indeed, there had not been wanting a few whispered ones during service-time, amongst the younger portion of the congregation.

Mr. Warwick smiled as he came out of the chapel and saw what was going on.

"Taking all hearts by storm here, as elsewhere," he said to himself, as he went forward to shake hands with Farmer Widdop and his friend, the former of whom again stated what he thought ought to be done.

"Some of our friends think we should give the place up, and build lower down the valley," said Mr. Warwick.

"What! Give it up? Give the old place up?" cried the farmer; and, instinctively, he and the others turned to look at it, though every stock and stone was as familiar as their own faces.

It was a plain enough building, in all conscience, which they saw. It was of the black-grey stone of the district, and weather-beaten withal. It had no porch or vestibule of any kind; but its two doors, open now, revealed the drab-painted pews within. A "singing gallery" stretched the whole width of the chapel behind the pulpit, and was built above the two vestries. The pulpit itself and the fronts of the galleries—for these ran on all four sides—were painted the pale yellow, dead-looking oak, so hideous, and so affected formerly, in Dissenting chapels. It was lighted by windows almost square in shape, except the two between the doors, which had rounded heads. Altogether, the chapel had scarcely one attractive feature;

but—and how much is bound up in those few words!—it was “the old place”!

Outside, there was seen to join up to it the “Chapel House,” built of the same dark stone, and, like it, without any ornament whatever. There was a window, about the same size as the chapel windows, on each side of the front door, and three on the higher storey, but the curtains and blinds of these gave the house a more cheerful appearance than the chapel. A low stone wall divided the manse garden from the chapel graveyard, and an iron gate gave communication between the two. At first when she had come to Dean Head, poor Mrs. Warwick hardly dared to look out of the windows as night came on, afraid, as she said to her husband, that she might “see something ghostly.” The graveyard ran also along the eastern side of the chapel, and was bounded there by a small school-room—an oblong building of two storeys. The chapel-keeper’s house, the windows of which looked directly upon the gravestones, stood back to the north; the door of it opened on the other side. It had always been one of the Warwick children’s treats to go into Absalom Rodley’s cottage (Absalom was the chapel-keeper), be treated by his wife to her “hard-cakes,” and shout to her down her ear-trumpet, for, like the minister, she was deaf, but very much worse than he was. Mrs. Rodley thought the world of the minister’s children; and she had missed Joyce sadly whilst she had been away, especially as “Miss Maud” had quite given up coming in to see her, now she was grown up. But there were still Master Jack and Miss Jill, and perhaps Miss Joyce now she was back, though she had grown up, too, into a beautiful young lady. Indeed, she had already run in to see her two or three times—the darling!

"You've had the chapel rather warm this morning, Absalom, haven't you?" said the minister, as a man with a short, squat figure appeared, to close the doors. "I should leave those open a while, I think."

"Well, I don't know, Mr. Warwick; it seemed to me about right."

"Well, but how is it by the thermometer?" asked the minister. "I think if you look"—

"I don't go by no termonitor, Mester Warwick," said Absalom, "I goes by my feelin's. It was a bit frosty this mornin', an' so I fires up."

"But the sun soon warms the air in September," said the minister with a smile. "You must remember that, Absalom."

Mr. Warwick held out his hand to Farmer Widdop, who was still gazing at the chapel.

"You don't like the idea of changing?" he said, as he bade him "Good-morning."

"No," said the farmer. "My mother and father was married here, an' they're buried just o'er yonder" (pointing towards the chapel-keeper's house); "I was kestened here an' married here, an' it seems to me, if I'm not buried here, I should hardly lie still anywheer else."

"Eh, Ambrose, but thou would that," said his friend, practical and unpoetical; "dead's dead, anywheer!"

Most of the groups had dispersed when Mr. Warwick passed through the gateway into his garden, but Joyce still lingered. She was talking with George and Fanny Farrar, the son and daughter of his senior deacon, who, with his wife, was slowly descending the hill, until the young people should overtake them.

Along with them were walking, Mrs. Dean and Zillah and Bryan, the latter inwardly fuming, and feeling that

he had been defrauded of something, seeing that he had been unable to get more than a nod and a smile from Joyce.

Zillah's dark, gipsy-like face wore a little frown—it was too bad that everybody else should be overlooked, just because Joyce Warwick had come back ; and she half-turned her head to see how long George Farrar was going to stay in the chapel-yard yet.

“I think Fanny is trying to fix a day for Maud and Joyce to come up,” said Mrs. Farrar, good-naturedly. “You'd better come too, Zillah, and you, Mr. Bryan ; we'll let you know when.”

Mrs. Farrar was very short and very fat, and her flesh shook as she walked down the steep road.

“I shall be very glad to come, thank you,” said Bryan, not waiting for Zillah's answer.

“It will depend what day,” said Zillah, warned by a look in her mother's eye. “But,” she added, impelled by her own wish, “I shall come if I can—I should like to, thank you.”

“You cannot be altogether out, Zillah,” said Mrs. Dean sharply ; “and you have two engagements this week with Agatha Whaite.”

“Well, anyhow, we'll hope she can come,” said Mrs. Farrar ; “she and Joyce used to be such friends, I remember. And if she cannot,” she added, turning to Bryan, “we shall be glad to see you all the same.”

“Thank you,” said Bryan, feeling very fond of Mrs. Farrar just then ; “I will come, then, in any case, if possible.”

Mrs. Dean, on the other hand, could have shaken Mrs. Farrar at that moment. Everything seemed to be going against her. She had not yet got over yesterday,

with its unfortunate circumstances. And this morning she had noticed that Bryan's eyes had, nearly all service-time, been turned upon the Manse pew. And if there were to be meetings here and there, tea-drinkings, etc., Bryan's new-born infatuation—possible, perhaps, for him to overcome now—would thrive and very likely master him. Then what would become of her life's ambition—what would be the end of all her hard work, her self-denial, her scheming? Was a mere slip of a girl, simply because she had a fair face, to put forth her fingers and snuff out for ever this hope for which she had slaved? Something akin to hatred of the girl sprang up in the woman's heart at the thought.

Besides having married one of the family, Mrs. Dean was a Dean by birth. Her husband had been her second cousin, and, in accepting him, this thought of acquiring once again the old family estate had been a factor in her decision. She expected at that time to inherit a considerable fortune; and her idea was, that her husband's means and her own conjoined might effect that which, alone, neither could do. She had loved him in a sense, but she was a woman of such self-dependent nature, and of such self-control, that she could easily have mastered what feeling she had for him, and would have chosen to do so, had she acted without other motive. "But," she had reflected, "he is too easy-going to work this himself, though he wishes it; therefore I must marry him, join my money to his when I get it, and spur him up to set about the business. Surely the Crimsworths would sell it, if they had a fair offer." And so she had married Bryan Dean the elder. But it seemed as if the Fates had been against her all along. Her father, after her marriage, through unwise speculations, had lost nearly all

his money, and at his death she had, therefore, inherited very little. Her husband had proved even more "easy-going" than she had thought him, and his own business, in consequence, had not been so remunerative as it ought to have been. Then had come his death, with nothing accomplished. In middle age, therefore, Mrs. Dean had found herself sitting, as it were, amidst the ruins of her hopes, which, to a woman of her character, was as gall and wormwood. And the bitterness of her cup was accentuated by the fact that an opportunity had arisen, could it have been taken advantage of, of gaining possession of the Dean-Hurst estate—at anyrate of advancing money upon it, which would eventually, in all human probability, have secured it. But instead of her husband being able to do it, some rich mill-owner in an adjoining valley, who was "a nobody" a few years before, who had "sprung from nothing," as it were, had found the needful money; and the goal seemed further off than ever. For what would such a man like better, than to make his own such a place as Dean-Hurst?

Still, Mrs. Dean was not the woman to give up any project upon which she had set her heart whilst a ghost of a chance remained for its achievement, and gradually the hopes, so long frustrated, centred themselves in her son. He was a lad of sixteen when his father died, and when he was between seventeen and eighteen his mother had unfolded to him her plan, and made him fully alive to her hopes. And he was just the youth to grasp such a situation: susceptible, sensitive, with a spice of romance in his nature, he was able to enter into his mother's feelings, and to share them. As he had grown older, so had grown his interest in the matter, and his strength of purpose to accomplish it. Under his mother's influence,

his pride of birth had increased ; to have been born a Dean, of the old family of Dean-Hurst, resident here for hundreds of years, was a fact which had become more and more a satisfaction to think of. Every time he walked or drove down to Beckfoot Station he had to pass the old house, for it was quite near to the road, and he was at once filled with a mixed feeling of pride and envy—envy of the present owners and occupiers of it, and pride in thinking that here had dwelt so long his own ancestors.

Dean-Hurst had never been a large estate, and the house was not large, but it was a most picturesque old place. It was built of grey stone, had many gables, and long mullioned windows. It had a large stone porch, ornamented, as were the gables, with stone balls, and above the porch was a rose-window. At the front, which faced the road, and along one side, ran a narrow terraced garden, with a high wall, and in this, opposite the front door, was a latticed gate, and, at the side, large gates opening on to the drive which led to the side door. When either gate was open—indeed you could, from the footpath, peep through the lattice — most tempting glimpses could be had of the house and the delightful old garden-beds, filled with the most fragrant of old-fashioned flowers, and of many quaint devices, and an ancient grey stone sundial in their midst.

The class to which the ancient Deans had belonged seems now to be almost extinct. If it were not so, we should doubtless, in these days of convenient diminutives, dub its members “squireens.” They were considerable landowners, but of the humbler sort ; they seem to have occupied a position between the yeoman and the county magnate. They possessed coats-of-arms, and appear to

have been proud of the dignity, judging from the frequency of their introduction into the ornamentation of their houses.

Some of these families exist to-day, it is true; but they have either merged into the manufacturing class—and in some instances have thereby saved their old manor-houses, and perhaps some portion of their estates—or they have, generally by marriage with heiresses, joined land with land, and now rank with the highest in the realm. Other such families have died out entirely; while not a few have gradually lost estate, ancestral home, and original place in society, and have become merged in the great mass of “common folk,” some living near, some far removed from the place of their former dignity.

The impoverished Deans had never moved far away. The main stock, at anyrate, of which the Bryan Dean we know was now the only living male representative, had always remained in or near Beck Dean. Possibly had they not been so “soil-socken,” to use a provincial phrase, it would have been better for them; and a wider field for enterprise might have more effectually furthered the realisation of their dream of reinstatement in their old ancestral home—for, more or less vividly, this had been the day-dream of each generation, since the folly and extravagance of one or two former ones had resulted in its alienation.

But all this time we have left the Deans, in whom we are most interested, walking with the elder Farrars down the steeply sloping lane which led from Dean Head Chapel into the main road; and it was not until the junction of these roads was reached that the younger Farrars overtook them, and they had then only a very short distance to walk together.

"Well, have you arranged it with Joyce?" asked Mrs. Farrar; "because perhaps Zillah and Mr. Byran will come too."

"Oh, that will be nice," said Fanny, who was a little, round, plump, good-natured replica of her mother; "but Joyce could not say 'when'; perhaps she will to-night, though. But she has somewhere to go with her father one day, and she has promised to take the children somewhere else another, and the Robsons have made her promise to go there another. And, as she says, if she could be 'quartered' it would be very convenient just now," laughed Fanny.

"You are going to spoil her amongst you, I think," remarked Mr. Farrar, who was tall and gaunt, and a little pompous in manner.

Mrs. Dean smiled a grim smile. "She is new yet," she said.

Zillah, meantime, was holding her head very high—as high as it would go, that is—as she walked by George Farrar's side; he had immediately joined her.

"I am glad to hear that you are coming up to Edge House this week," he said by and by, looking down at the little dark face—his own was light and ruddy.

"I am not sure that I am coming," said Zillah.

"Well, you'll do your best, at all events," said Mr. George.

"I've never said so," was the retort.

"What makes you so cross, Miss Zillah?"

"I'm not cross," said the perverse girl, turning upon him a beaming smile, and altering her tone. "Yes, I'll come, if I possibly can. Good-morning," and she held out her hand.

They had come to where their ways parted. Other

"Good-mornings" were said, the Farrars turned to the right up the hill, and the Deans continued their course down the valley, Mrs. Farrar calling out, the last thing, "We will let you know the day," and Mrs. Dean ruminating in her distracted mind how she could prevent her son and daughter going to Edge House.

At five o'clock of the afternoon on the same Sunday there was a knock at the door of Higher Dean Cottage; and on Rebecca's opening it there were seen to be standing there, an elderly gentleman and a young lady of two or three-and-twenty—they were the rich Mr. Whaite and his daughter Agatha.

When Zillah heard by their voices who had come, she rushed out of the sitting-room and greeted the latter effusively. Mrs. Dean followed, and did likewise, while Bryan, of course, came forward and shook hands with both, but without any demonstration of particular gladness.

"It is such a beautiful evening," said Agatha Whaite, "that I persuaded my father to walk up here, Zillah; and, if you will have us, we will go with you to chapel."

"Ay, she would come," said Mr. Whaite, speaking with a strong provincial accent. "When Agatha sets her mind on a thing, that thing she'll have or do, yo' may depend."

Mr. Whaite did not speak as if this trait were at all objectionable. He laughed as he spoke, and Agatha laughed too, and blushed a little. Mrs. Dean was watching her, and saw the blush and the quick glance at Bryan,—wholly lost upon him, the least conceited of men,—and hoped in her inmost heart that this was true.

"Oh!" cried Agatha, as they entered the sitting-room,

“you have not finished tea ! I am ashamed ; pray go on and do so, just as if we were not here. We had ours very early.”

“Oh, you must take another cup ; you have had a walk since,” said Mrs. Dean.

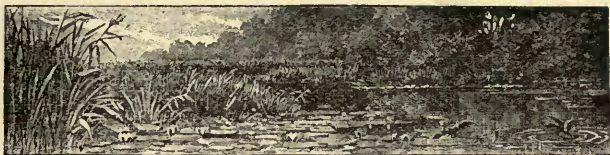
Zillah was blushing because there was no cake or anything on the table, but plain bread and butter. And Agatha noticed that too ; but her eyes were riveted on the silver tea-pot with the crest, and the cream-ewer and the sugar-basin to match, and on the old blue and richly-gilt china, and they were eyes of envy with which she looked.

Agatha Whaite, though appreciating to the full the advantages of ample means, was a little disposed to look down upon the father whose energy and business ability had produced them. She did not like to think of his humble origin, and she objected to his and her poor relations. She had in her character a curious mixture of the practical and the sentimental—and one strong vein of the latter ran in the direction of worship of good birth. It was this which had drawn her to cultivate the friendship of Zillah Dean, and this which had first given rise to her penchant for Bryan, which duller eyes than those of Mrs. Dean might easily have noted. An idea regarding him had entered her brain, and fostered the feeling in her heart ; it was a romantic idea, and, in a sense, a monetary sense, a very generous one. Her mother had been long dead. She was an only child, and her father adored her. Her will had rarely ever been crossed, and she had faith in her own good fortune. All her discontent was reflected from the past, with the present she was satisfied, of the future she was hopeful.

Yes, that past was disquieting enough. Agatha tapped

her foot on the floor and frowned a little, as she gazed at the silver and china, which had descended from several generations of Deans, and reflected that her own grandfather had trundled a wheelbarrow, and collected rags and bones—very likely at the back door of Dean-Hurst! At that moment she despised her wealth and the comforts it gave her, and said to herself that she could have been quite content with bread and butter, washed down with weak tea out of a crested silver tea-pot! It was “miserable stuff” though, she could but acknowledge; and she wished she had, like her father, persisted in her refusal to have any. But Mrs. Dean had insisted, and then—had she not placed her a chair by Bryan’s? Agatha felt that she had a friend in court in Mrs. Dean; it was quite evident that, in her eyes, present wealth compensated for humble origin. Was it otherwise with Bryan Dean, that he looked so coldly upon her? Was it her wealth that was keeping him back? or could he not get over the “rags and bones,” she wondered? Ah, he would, he should, in time!

Service began at six o’clock at Dean Head, so there was not very much time to linger over tea; and soon the whole party, with Rebecca also, were on their way to chapel—Mr. Whaite walking with Mrs. Dean, and Bryan with Zillah and her friend. But Zillah soon dropped behind and joined Rebecca, and Bryan only was left to walk with Agatha Whaite.



CHAPTER IV

IN THE CHAPEL-KEEPER'S COTTAGE

“The calm brow through the parted hair,
The gentle lips which know no guile,
Softening the blue eyes' thoughtful care
With the bland beauty of their smile.”—*Whittier*.



THOUGH Agatha Whaite would never have been asked to sit for her portrait, that she might pose as one of the “beauties” of her day, there was not much to complain of in the matter of her looks. She had a good figure, a little above the middle height, regular features, and light hair with a slightly red tinge. But Bryan, glancing at her in chapel that night, thought he had never noticed before how heavy her features were, nor how lacking in expression her light brown eyes and whole face. But then he had just been looking across the aisle into the Manse pew at Joyce Warwick, and “comparisons are odorous,” as the renowned Mrs. Partington once remarked. He repressed something very much like a sigh as he turned away his head, crossed his legs, glanced past Mr. Whaite's rugged face, and looked up at the minister.

His mother was watching him and reading him like a

book ; and she cast a swift look upon Joyce, which, had such a thing been possible, would have annihilated her upon the spot.

But of this, or of the fact that anybody in the world bore her the slightest ill-will, Joyce Warwick was happily unconscious. It is not in human nature, in the woman nature, at anyrate, and especially was it not in Joyce Warwick's nature, to be unmoved by general admiration and approval. In her case, however, it was not, as is often found, the woman's vanity which was touched, it was her heart ; and the kind things people were saying to her and of her made her very happy. Then she was very fond of her father ; and as she sat, with upturned face—listening to his beloved voice, a smile of content stole in her face, content and thankfulness—that once more she was at home to hear it again. Her mind reverted to the long list of unsatisfactory, continental Sundays she had spent, and the vivid contrast presented itself between the noise and bustle of the Brussels streets and the peaceful Stonyshire valley, where she now found herself. Her eyes were bright with emotion, her mouth was slightly open, her face was all alive with thought, when, drawn by some magnetism, Bryan's head turned once again towards the minister's pew. At the same time Joyce happened to make the least possible movement, and their eyes met—not only met, but were held for a moment ; it was as if soul met soul in that look, an electric current of sympathy passing from one to the other.

The crash of a hymn-book on the Deans' pew floor broke the spell ; and in some confusion Joyce dropped her eyelids, while Bryan's increased colour might be accounted for by his stooping to pick up the book.

Agatha Whaite seemed to see nothing—did, in fact, see nothing. Her self-complacency and faith in her good fortune opened the door to hope and shut it on suspicion. She had always, since coming to Beck Dean, been given to understand, both by Zillah and all her other friends who knew him, that though no woman-hater, Bryan Dean had, as yet, shown himself proof against all the attractions of the sex, and so she had, as she supposed, “a clear field.” And given this, she had little doubt that eventually, herself and what she could bring, would effect that which others had failed to do. Zillah saw nothing either, except that her mother had, on some account, purposely thrown down the hymn-book.

The sermon came to an end very shortly after this, the lights were turned up so that the people could see to find the hymn, it was sung,—heartily, as only Stonyshire folks can sing, or do sing,—Mr. Warwick pronounced the benediction, and the congregation streamed out. It seemed almost dark in the chapel-yard on first coming out, though the twilight had not quite gone, and the moon was rising. The change was a little bewildering, especially to a stranger; and Agatha Whaite, having lost sight, first of her father and then of Mrs. Dean and Zillah, naturally clung to the only one of her company that she could see.

“I believe I shall have to take your arm, Mr. Bryan,” she said, the moment she espied him. “I am stumbling every step.” And Agatha suited the action to the word; indeed, Bryan could, of course, do no other than hold out his arm.

Before they reached the gate they overtook the others, and it did not seem so dark, but Agatha still seemed liable to stumble, and so continued her hold of Bryan’s

arm. The young man longed inexpressibly to have speech with Joyce, and to touch her hand ; it was hard that to-night, too, as at noon, he should be denied this, harder still because of that look which had passed between them. But what did it all mean ? What was happening to him ? Was this what men called "falling in love" ? He had been rallied sometimes by young men of his acquaintance, and told that his turn would come ; but he had not believed them. Besides, as he had often told himself, he had other things to think of than matrimony, at anyrate for many years to come. Perhaps if, and when, the one ambition of his life were really accomplished, he might begin to cherish the thought. No doubt he would ; indeed, as a matter of course, he must marry then. But he had thought of it as a very deliberate action, a matter of selecting and choosing—always, of course, with a possibility of refusal on the lady's side, for Bryan was no coxcomb.

As these questions and thoughts flashed and quivered in Bryan's breast, he went blindly and silently on, with Agatha hanging on his arm, he taking not the slightest notice of her, and not looking where he stepped or where he obliged her to step. There were many loose stones lying on the steep road, and it was getting almost too dark to see them.

Agatha nearly coming to grief on one of these, an uncommonly large one, Bryan suddenly woke up with the start he got, and instinctively stretched out his other hand to save her ; and when she had recovered her balance, he became suddenly conscious that he was holding her hand, and that she was blushing furiously. It trembled a little in his grasp, too, but then that might be the result of the stumble she had had. Bryan felt dreadfully uncomfort-

able, for all at once there rushed into his mind, with vivid force, the words that his mother had spoken about Agatha, and which he had refused to believe.

"I hope you are not hurt," he said, as he gently let her hand go and essayed to walk on. "I ought to have been looking better where we were going," he added apologetically, and with an embarrassed little laugh.

"Oh, I am not hurt, I assure you, Mr. Bryan; it is nothing, really," said Agatha; "only I certainly should have fallen if I had not had hold of your arm." And she settled her hand more confidently there, and looked up into his face gratefully, and, indeed, with something more than gratitude. Their relative positions were such that Agatha felt no scruple in making decided advances. She had thousands where he had hundreds; he was fancy-free, and she loved him. She could be the means whereby he could realise the dream of his youth, the ambition of his manhood, for of these things she had learned from Zillah. But it was more than likely that her very wealth, which she wished to place at his feet as a stepping-stone to this, was proving only a stumblingblock. She must let him see that it need not be so. As a rule, a woman must hide her feelings until she is asked to reveal them; but there are exceptions to all rules. Thus, hardly in so many words, but substantially thus, argued Agatha Whaite with herself.

Bryan Dean shook himself together after that little episode, and made those troublesome questions we have spoken of stand in abeyance. He carefully selected the best side of the lane to walk upon, and he tried, with some success, to enter into rational conversation. But he was very glad indeed when the door of Upper Dean

Cottage was reached, and he found Mr. Whaite waiting for his daughter, and ready to say "Good-night."

Mrs. Dean had been very pressing that the two should call again, but Mr. Whaite wanted his supper, having had so early a tea, and so he had turned a deaf ear to the invitation. She had, indeed, mentioned their staying to supper, but Mr. Whaite, judging perhaps by what he had seen on the tea-table, felt an inward conviction that no supper Mrs. Dean was likely to provide would appease his present hunger. He was, therefore, conveniently blind this time to his daughter's appealing looks, when the invitation was repeated on her arrival with Bryan, and there was nothing for it but to shake hands and say "Good-night." The young man was unwillingly conscious, however, that Agatha's hand lingered in his longer than was necessary when she said it. The three Deans turned indoors silently. Bryan went up to his own room for a little while, to adjust his thoughts, if possible. Zillah went into hers, and took off her things with a sense of dissatisfaction. How was it, she wondered, that George Farrar had not been at chapel? And Mrs. Dean sat down in the kitchen, whither she had gone to stir the fire,—for Rebecca would not be in for an hour yet,—sorry on some accounts that the Whaites had not come in again, but glad on others; for had they stayed to supper, the cold joint must have been brought out, and they must have gone dinnerless on the morrow, except for some bread and cheese. As it was, they could eat the bread and cheese to-night. But about Agatha Whaite? Surely Bryan could be no longer blind? And surely seeing, he would never be such a fool and madman as to fling away his good fortune? He must not—he should not.

Meantime, Joyce, after speech with Fanny Farrar and one or two others in the chapel-yard, had gone indoors. But she was the victim of a strange restlessness, and a vague consciousness of disappointment mingled itself with the sweet trouble which Bryan Dean's look had wrought within her. She did not understand herself, the feeling was too vague to be put into words ; but thus rendered, it would have been something like this—that, “after looking at her as he had done, Bryan should go away without a word !”

After Maud, having taken off her things, had left the room which the two girls shared, Joyce stole downstairs again and into the garden. She stood some time by the wall under the shade of a sycamore, and looked down the valley. It lay in deep shade, and a slight autumnal mist which pervaded it was silvered here and there by the moonbeams. It was solemnly still—everybody had gone away. Absalom had locked up the chapel, and weird shadows lingered about the tombstones. It was rather cold too, and Joyce shivered a little ; but still she lingered. She felt sad ; and was puzzled with herself for feeling so. This was the first check to her joyousness since her return.

The darkness was increasing, but the moon was becoming brighter every moment. A cloud had obscured it for a few seconds, and when it emerged, it looked quite brilliant. Far down below a glittering spot in the valley showed where the beck, not otherwise seen in the gloom, made a mirror for the moon, and, close by, the stone roof of a mill shone white in the light of it. Suddenly it occurred to Joyce that this must, from its position, be Higher Dean Mill. But why should the thought make her heart beat faster ? With a troubled surprise at herself, she turned away.

But Joyce did not yet care to go back into the house, and she therefore unlatched the garden-gate giving access to the lane, and, without aim or purpose, slowly skirted the wall of the chapel-yard and the school-building. Doing so, she by and by came to the corner of the chapel-keeper's house, and the desirability of getting rid of her own thoughts doubtless gave birth to her sudden impulse to enter it. She knocked gently, and then lifted the latch and held the door slightly ajar.

"May I come in?" she cried.

"Ay, sure, come in an' welcome," was the reply in Absalom's voice, kindly but rough; and then Joyce heard him shout to his wife, before he could see her—

"It's Miss Joyce, Marinda, an' she wants to know if she may come in." And Absalom gave a little laugh at the very idea of there being any doubt of her admission.

"Come in? I should think so, bless her heart," cried the old woman. "Rebecca, move thy chair a bit an' make room for her next to me."

Joyce came forward, closing the door behind her, and found that, besides Absalom and his wife, there was seated on the hearth, his wife's sister, Rebecca Rigg, the Deans' old servant. She would have drawn back then, but Mr. Rodley would not hear of it.

"Sho reckons to want to go away ageean, because yo'r Rebecca's here," he shouted down the ear-trumpet to his wife. He made a point, when he was present, of always letting her know what was going on; and it was rather embarrassing sometimes to people to hear their own words repeated.

"Nothin' o' t' sort—nothin' o' t' sort; sit yo' down!" cried Mrs. Rodley, in a thin, piping voice. She was a small, neat-looking old woman—she was much older than

Rebecca—and wore a white linen full-bordered cap and a plaid shoulder-shawl.

Rebecca, too, uttered a mild protest against Joyce's



He cut a comical figure as he flourished his pipe

withdrawal. So she seated herself on the chair indicated—a low one, with a patchwork cover, and iron rockers which crunched very much as they moved on the sanded floor. Absalom sat in the chimney-corner, smoking a long clay pipe after the labours of the day ; and he cut a

comical figure as he flourished this in the air from time to time, when he bent to speak down the ear-trumpet. His wife sat close to his elbow, and he could do this quite conveniently. Joyce sat next, and nearly opposite the fire, which danced merrily in a grate that was as black and bright as blacklead and "elbow-grease" could make it. On the other side of the hearth, opposite Absalom, sat Rebecca, with a grim smile on her face. She was thinking, as she looked at Joyce, of Mr. Bryan's three steps at a time going upstairs, and of her mistress' fears. But perhaps, after all, she and herself had taken fright too soon; for she had seen something to-night which pointed in another direction, and the right one—Mr. Bryan and Miss Whaite, arm-in-arm.

The cottage was cosy, and bright, and clean, as only Stonyshire cottages are. A hearthrug of dark cut-cloth, relieved by a heart-shaped pattern in red, lay before the fender, which shone like silver. On the mantelpiece stood half a dozen brightly-polished brass candlesticks of graduated size, looking like golden sentinels of the china flower and fruit sellers standing between them. And a pair of highly-coloured little tin trays completed the ornamentation of the mantelshelf, which was very high, the tops of the tallest pair of candlesticks reaching nearly to the ceiling. There was a "lang-settle" behind the door, an oaken chest of drawers, in whose brass handles flickered cheerily the reflection of the blazing coals in the grate, and a Dutch clock in the corner, which had from childhood been Joyce's delight, on account of the figures at the top of it—an old man who came out of a hole there when the weather was going to be wet, and an old woman who at those times kept carefully inside, but came out and stood there bravely

enough when the day promised to be fine. Many had been the times, when some little pleasure was in store which was dependent on the weather, that Joyce had run in to the chapel-keeper's cottage to see if "the old woman" were "out of her little house." She turned her eyes upon the clock now, and smiled at the remembrance.

"Eh, Miss Joyce, yo'r lookin' at t'owd clock, I see," said Mrs. Rodley; "t'owd woman's been in an' out a lot o' times, bout annybody to tak' anny notice on her, while yo've been i' fureign parts."

Joyce laughed at this. "I always used to think about her in Brussels when we were going anywhere," she said.

Absalom shouted this information down the ear-trumpet, as that instrument happened to be in the ear next to him. But Mrs. Rodley changed it, and she and Joyce managed to hold a little conversation about the places she had visited and the things she had seen. Amongst other sights, she mentioned the cathedral in Brussels, and described its wonderful pulpit.

"My word," said Absalom, "but I should like to see that theer pilpit! But it 'ould scare annybody like, to come on it of a sudden, I should think. Fancy annybody comin' into Dean Head Chapel here, an' seein' a skeleton peepin' at 'em round t' corner o' t' pilpit!"

There was a general laugh at this, and, of course, Mrs. Rodley had to have it explained, Absalom shouting out also something about "Adam and Eve skulkin' away round t' other corner," and adding—

"I tell thee what it is, Marinda, thee an' me'll ha'e to go to fureign parts yet," and Absalom shook with laughter at his own joke.

"I'd liefer see t' little dugs an' cows drawin' things, nor that pilpit, if I went," said Mrs. Rodley.

"Well," said Absalom, after a reflective puff or two, "I think we're naither on us likely to see manny pilpits beside Dean Head; an' if tha' could, but hear t' sarmons as we getten fro' 'em, tha wouldn't want, naither. Eh, Miss Joyce," he went on, "it gets betther an' betther. There's nobody fit to howld a candle to him i' these parts. We ought to be a peculiar people, zealous o' good works up here, for we're towld our duty faithful—we that are—an' a good example set us beside, though there is those 'at says as t' minister keeps hisself to hisself raither to' mich."

"Those are the people who forget that good sermons need time and study to prepare them," said Joyce with spirit.

"That's exactly what I tells 'em when they talks i' that way to me," said Absalom. "'Why,' I says to one on 'em one day 'at were talkin' i' that road, 'it's just meterly t' same,' I says, 'as if yo' enj'yed a good dinner, an' praised it up, an' then begun a grum'lin' at yo'r wife as had cooked it, for not havin' gone out a walkin' wi' yo'.'"

There was a little pause when Absalom had ended this speech; but only for a moment, and then he said, still with his mind on Dean Head—

"Mester Whaite was at chapel to-night, I noticed, an' his daughter too. They're not sich out-an'-out Church folk, it seems; I've seen her here afore."

"Ay," said Rebecca; adding, with peculiar significance, "an' I dar'say yo'll see her here many a time again."

"Why, what does ta mean by that?" asked Absalom, taking his pipe out of his mouth in interested surprise.

"Well, it's appen to' soon to talk about it, for nothin's settled yet; but yo'll likely be hearin' somethin' some day about her an' t' young masther."

"Mr. Bryan? My word!" cried Absalom; "but he knows what he's doin'. Why, I reckon her feyther's fair rowlin' i' money."

Rebecca had kept the corner of her nearer eye fixed on Joyce's face, and she was sure that a flush rose there, as she heard these things, other than that caused by the fire.

"I should think so," said Rebecca; "they say he could buy up all t' other manufacturers i' Beck Dean an' Beck Foot, easy."

"My word!" said Absalom again, quite excitedly; "but it'll be a rare thing for Mester Bryan, if he can manage it. Why, it'll bring t' Deans up as high as ever they were i' owld times. 'Appen," he added, "tak' 'em back to Dean-Hurst."

"That's just what they want," said Rebecca grimly; "what t' mistress 'ould nearly sell her soul for."

"Does ta hear what yo'r Rebecca says?" shouted Absalom into the ear-trumpet; and he retailed, almost word for word, what Rebecca had said, and remarked what a grand thing it would be should the Deans be restored to Dean-Hurst.

"There'll be no need to be sich nippin' an' screwin' as there is, if that happens," was Mrs. Rodley's quiet comment. "And that reminds me," she went on, "that it's time to look after a bit o' supper."

"I don't know whether I'd better stop to-night, Marinda," shouted Rebecca. "Perhaps those folks'll be stoppin' at Higher Dean, an' I shall be wanted."

"Well, please thyself," said Mrs. Rodley; "but if I were thee I'd have a good square meal, while I'd t' chance."

Joyce rose and said she must go. It was not the first

time that she had heard uncomplimentary things said of Mrs. Dean's housekeeping; indeed, in times past, she had had experience of its sparseness; but somehow to-night this talk grated upon her. And not this alone, either.

As, after resisting pressing invitations to "stop a bit longer," she bade the inmates "Good-night," and closed the door of Absalom Rodley's cottage behind her, Joyce paused in the flag-paved yard, into which also the back-door of the Manse opened; she had a giddy sensation, like one who has received a physical blow. Her heart had sunk within her bosom, heavy as lead. Relieved for a time of her unaccountable depression by the quaint talk of Absalom Rodley and his wife, it had returned with tenfold force during the talk of the last few minutes. But why?—why? What was it to her? Or, if anything, why not gladness? Why could she not feel, as Absalom evidently felt, glad at the prospect of Bryan's enrichment? And he had been so kind to her, too—so very kind—since the moment that she had come home. His had been the first face she had seen, and how *good* it had been to see it. And yesterday—what a happy, happy time they had had together, she and Zillah and—Mr. Bryan! Perhaps she was getting spoiled by all the fuss which had been made of her the last few days, and could not bear to hear of any one else being thought much of. She could not before, certainly, have believed it possible; she had imagined herself free from the meanness of envy; but then, who can truly know herself?

Joyce opened the door, stole upstairs, and mechanically took off her bonnet and mantle. This done, she dropped disconsolately into the wide window-seat, with her hands clasped on her lap, and gazed down into the moonlit

valley. But it was not that she really saw. What she did see was Bryan Dean's face, his eyes looking into hers. And the sweet trouble stirred in her heart again with renewed force. Then a half-revelation of the truth about herself came to her, and, covering her face with her hands, she murmured—

“Oh, why, why, if this they say be true, why did you look at me as you did, Bryan Dean?”



CHAPTER V

UNDERCRAGG

“ Is it not gold
That makes the chastest yield to lust? the wisest to
Folly? the faithfulest to deceit? and
The most holy in heart, to be most hollow of heart?” *Lilly*.—



JUST a week had passed since the arrival home of Joyce Warwick, and Bryan Dean was again at Beck Foot Station, having arrived there, though by an earlier train than on the previous Tuesday, from Baleborough, where it had been market-day. It was inevitable, in his state of mind, that he should there live over again all the little incidents of his meeting with Joyce—he saw her as a stranger, he read the eager smile of recognition on her sweet face, he felt the touch of her hands in his.

Instead of hurrying out as usual, he rather lingered on the platform, absorbed in his recollections. And when he did, very deliberately, wend his way outside, and take his seat in the gig, which was waiting for him, he was still in a kind of reverie. He took the reins from Sam mechanically, and turned the horse's head in the right

direction, more from habit than any thought about it. For now, Joyce was by his side in the gig, and he was hearing again her expressions of delight.

But Bryan was soon brought down to reality, and the present more prosaic state of things, by divers jerks on the part of Sam, whose right elbow eventually came into rather unpleasant contact with Bryan's left rib.

"What are you about, Sam?" cried his master, roused at last.

"I've got a note somewheres," said Sam, "'at t' Missis has give me for yo', an'—oh, here it is," he ended, bringing the note out of his pocket with another jerk.

"Something that wouldn't wait until I got home, eh?" said Bryan, half to himself, as he took the note. Then to Sam—

"Why didn't you give it me at the station? I daresay it is some errand that my mother wants doing in Beck Foot."

"I dun know, I'm sure," said Sam stolidly.

Bryan tore open the envelope, and saw, to his surprise, that there were two little notes inside—one in his mother's handwriting and the other in that of Agatha Whaite, with which he was familiar from her frequent invitations to Zillah—indeed, the one he held, for he took it out first, was addressed to his sister, and ran thus:—

UNDERCRAGG, *Tuesday*.

MY DEAR ZILLAH,—I am quite expecting you to-day, as we arranged on Sunday; but it has occurred to me that it is a pity for your brother to go home from Beck Foot, and then have all the way back to Undercragg to come to fetch you home, so I am writing to ask you to let your groom take a message or a note when he meets

him at the station, telling him to come and have tea here. Papa, as well as myself, will be very glad to see him.

Your loving friend,

AGATHA WHAITE.

P.S.—We will wait tea until the twenty-past-six train is in, if he does not come by the earlier one. You and I can have an early cup, to put us on.

Bryan felt an uncomfortable flush rise to his face as he read this note. Irresistibly, his mind reverted to Sunday night, and also to what his mother had said to him regarding Miss Whaite. Of itself it would have said nothing—it would merely have been an evidence of kind thoughtfulness on Agatha's part—but following other indications, it was an additional feather showing which way the wind was blowing. He put Agatha's note back in the envelope, and took out his mother's. Her's ran thus:—

DEAR BRYAN,—A groom from Undercragg brought the enclosed note this morning. You will, *of course*, accept this kind invitation. And, dear Bryan, remember what I said to you the other day, and what you yourself must have seen on Sunday night; and for your own sake, for my sake, for all our sakes, make the best of your opportunity. I can never forgive you if you do not, in the way now open to you, end all our difficulties, and achieve the ambition of our lives. It must be Providence which has opened it out, and you are not one to fight against Providence.

I shall not expect you home to tea. I am sending Rebecca out, and shall probably go out myself.

Your affectionate Mother.

Bryan put back this note also, and deposited the envelope in a pocket, tightened his hold of the reins, and looked gloomily along Boxer's back. He had a feeling as of being entangled in a net.

The valley road was very steep just in this part, and the horse was walking. On the top of the hill, just appearing in sight on the left hand, stood Dean-Hurst. Bryan, lifting his head, caught sight of it, as he had done scores of times before—and looked at it with longing eyes. As Boxer mounted the hill, and he drew nearer to it, the old mansion stood picturesquely out against a low band of red which still lingered in the western sky. It was a homestead greatly to be desired on its own account; but when, in addition to this, it was surmounted by the halo of family tradition, it was rendered doubly desirable. He had often gazed upon its high pointed gables and long mullioned windows in a hopeless way—but oftener, especially of late years, with strong determination. At whatever cost, Dean-Hurst should be won back. It might take many years to accomplish, it probably would take the best part of his life, but it would be worth any sacrifice he could make, could he enter into possession of the old abode of his ancestors, and refund, as it were, the family of the Deans.

But money was not to be made so fast in reality as in imagination and anticipation, and however saving and economical a man or a family may be, the cost of living is not small. Like the view in a telescope reversed, the time when his ambition was likely to be realized, if ever, stretched far away now in the dim distance. There had been a spell of bad trade in his branch of manufacture, and a consequent loss of several hundreds, only just lately, and he had been feeling correspondingly depressed. But now, here, close to his hand as it were, almost begging to be taken up, were the means by which he might accomplish the foremost wish of his life. A

natural way, an easy way, an honourable way lay open to him. He had as little conceit as a man well can have, but he could no longer doubt that Agatha Whaite, with her large fortune, were to be had for the asking. Why could he not feel glad? He respected and liked his sister's friend well enough, and such feelings were oftentimes fanned into the flame of love. He had a dim conviction that had this happened a month ago—a fortnight—nay, little more than a week ago, he should have so tried to fan his feelings, and probably with success. What then now made him hesitate—what held him back? He knew, alas! only too well. It was a pair of little outstretched hands—a pair of clear, frank, blue eyes—it was the fair face and form of Joyce Warwick. For an instant, as this conviction seized fast hold of him, he felt almost angry with the girl. Why had she thus come between him and his ambition?

Then Bryan Dean gave himself a mental shake, as it were—he was just passing Dean-Hurst, and he caught a glimpse of the terraced garden, the porch, and the rose window—and he asked himself why he was such a fool. Why need he let Joyce Warwick interfere with his plans? It would be ridiculous to allow it. He had only known her a week—he did not count his knowledge of her as a child—he had only seen her three times, and was the thought of her to block up his path, to blight his prospects, to frustrate the fruition of his life's ambition? It should not—he would be master of himself—he would go to Undercragg, and he would behave as he would have done a month ago, when Joyce Warwick was far away, and no more to him than one of his own mill-hands.

A few more minutes' drive, and the gig with its

occupants arrived at a point where a steep road to the right led down to a bridge over the beck. Below the bridge, on both sides the stream, were the buildings of a large manufactory—a lofty, many-storeyed mill, extensive weaving sheds, and important-looking offices. These were the Lower Dean Mills, belonging to Mr. Whaite. On the opposite side of the valley, which was very deep here, rose a wooded height, and a little to the left of the mills, near the top of this wood, there rose sheer from it a lofty bare crag. In the midst of the trees, some distance beneath this, stood Mr. Whaite's house, well named, from its position, "Undercragg." It was a small house originally, that had been erected for a manager, but had been enlarged twice—once recently, when Mr. Whaite had come to it—and was of no particular style. Its chief attraction lay in its romantic situation. This, and its convenient position with regard to his mills here, had decided Mr. Whaite upon occupying it in preference to his former residence, which lay rather low in an adjoining valley, where also he had mills. Compelled to be so arranged, from the nature of the ground, the pleasure-gardens formed a series of terraces; and it had been at great expense that a large tennis-lawn had been laid out, the face of the wood having to be cut away for the purpose at one side of the house. The lawn thus presented the appearance of the bottom of a quarry, or a cave, with the top off, and carpeted with mossy grass—its sides, wherever soil enough could be placed on jutting rock or root of tree, being planted with shrubs, small flowering trees, and ferns. At the foot of its rocky walls were gnarled-wood seats and two or three rustic summer-houses. This lawn was a charming spot, and greatly admired by all visitors to Under-

cragg. It opened to the south-west, near a natural platform of rock, and, now that the foliage was thinning a little, it was possible from the valley road to see this opening. As Bryan, a little irresolute still, in spite of the conclusions he had arrived at, drew rein at the junction of the roads, he looked up across the valley to Undercragg, and could distinctly see two figures standing on the jutting rock in front of the lawn—doubtless they were those of Zillah and Agatha, and probably they were looking out for him. They would be able to see, from that standpoint, a considerable length of the valley road, and no doubt they could see him now. It would be shabby not to go. To-day, at anyrate, he must yield to Agatha Whaite's influence, whatever he might do in the future. And so deciding, Bryan turned his horse down the steep road towards the bridge.

"I'm not going straight home, Sam," he said. "I'm going to join Miss Zillah up at Undercragg. You can tell your mistress so when you get back."

"Missis said as how she didn't think as yo'd be comin' 'ome," said Sam with a grin. Sam was not nearly so stupid as he looked. Besides, though he was only eighteen, he had a sweetheart of his own, and he thought he had a good idea of what was going on.

Bryan would like to have pulled Sam's ears for him; but he did not even look his way, Boxer requiring all his attention as he trod the steep slope, making the gig swing tremendously, and so only he, poor unconscious animal, received the vexed expression which shot from the master's eyes.

The lodge and gate giving entrance to Mr. Whaite's grounds were only a short distance to the left, after

crossing the bridge, but the drive therefrom up to the house was somewhat circuitous, as was compulsory.

"There, you can turn back here, Sam," said Bryan, having reached a point from which there was a steep narrow walk up to the lawn; "I will not drive up to the front," and as he spoke, he stopped and sprang from the gig. He stood and watched Sam turn and go down the winding drive, where he soon disappeared from view; then he took the winding path upwards.

"Oh, how good—how very good of you to come!" cried Agatha Whaite, as she came forward to greet him, on his emerging into sight from the trees. She was wearing a handsome dress, pale green in colour, which suited her complexion well. She was thoroughly pleased; and her heavy features had an unusual look of animation, and even her eyes shone with the gratification she felt at Bryan's acceptance of her invitation—altogether, that young man thought he had never seen her look so nice as she did that evening. A little flush rose to her face as they shook hands, and Bryan also felt slightly embarrassed.

"It was kind of you to ask me," he said; "and I am glad, as you did so, that I happened to come from Baleborough by the earlier train. It would have been dreadful to have kept you waiting for tea until nearly seven o'clock."

"Wouldn't it, Zillah?" he said to his sister, who now came up.

"We should have managed to exist, I daresay," said Zillah saucily, "seeing that we have had a cosy 'four-o'clock' in one of the summer-houses. All the same, it's well you've come early, because you can just see to have a game of tennis. You can take my place—can't he, Agatha?—and I'll watch."

"Would you like it? Aren't you too tried? Father will not be up from the mill for half an hour yet, if you care for a game, Mr. Bryan. It will be too dark after tea."

"But I have no tennis-shoes," said Bryan; "and it would be a shame to play on your lovely lawn, without."

"I think you'll have to invest in a pair," said Agatha with a laugh. "In the meantime, we will look over the enormity. As for a racket, Zillah will lend you hers, I know." This racket of Zillah's had been a present from herself. How much she wished that she dared give Bryan one, also!

It was plain to Bryan that Agatha wanted him to have a game, and so he consented, with more apparent than real alacrity. He had been in the midst of the dust and bustle of the Baleborough Exchange for several hours, he had since then had a railway journey of twenty miles, and he had *not* partaken of "afternoon tea."

He need not have been afraid, however. Agatha Whaite was one of those girls who think of everything. In passing Zillah, to reach the lawn, she whispered something to her, and she and Bryan had not been playing many minutes ere a white-aproned, white-capped servant made her appearance, bearing a tray, on whose snowy embroidered cover lay a small plate of sandwiches, a seed-loaf, and all the requisites for tea. This she carried into the nearest summer-house, and then, approaching Agatha, said—

"Miss Dean wished me to tell you, ma'am" (being the mistress of the house, the servants always addressed Agatha as "ma'am," not "miss"), "that she is not coming out again. She feels a little chilly, and will stay by the drawing-room fire until you come in."



How very good of you
to come "

"Very well, Simpkin," said Agatha; "tell Miss Dean, with my love, to make herself as cosy as possible," and with her heart beating fast at the pleasurable thought of being left alone with Bryan, she led the way to the summer-house, and proceeded to pour out tea for him.

It has been said—I do not say it is true—that the way to an Englishman's heart is through his stomach. And certainly, though he was no gourmand, tired Bryan Dean's heart warmed to Agatha Whaite as it never had before, as he sat in the summer-house, and she gracefully plied him with hot, strong tea, sandwiches, and cake. True, his heart did not beat one more to the minute, but he felt that, at anyrate, he was bound to be grateful—he was grateful for her kindness. Agatha, on her side, sat beaming and blushing, and looking almost pretty—her heart going at greatly accelerated speed.

The door of this particular summer-house faced the opening in the quarry, if we may so call it, and a very pretty view there was from it. Bryan, as he drank his tea, looked out and remarked upon it.

"Yes," said Agatha, "it is pretty—very. And there is something we can see from here which must be very interesting to you."

"What is that?" asked Bryan. But just as he spoke he saw what Agatha must mean, for, across the valley, and some distance down towards Beck Foot, he could make out, through its surrounding trees, two gables, a portion of the roof, and one chimney-stack of Dean-Hurst. His face changed, and his heart did beat faster then.

"Ah," said Agatha, "I see you have discovered it. What an interesting old place it is, Mr. Bryan, and what

a trouble it must be to you to think of other people possessing it."

Her voice had taken on a soft, sympathetic tone, and she looked up in Bryan's face with an expression to match.

"One gets accustomed to troubles, as to other things," said Bryan; "and this I have had, ever since I can remember."

"But you will not—you need not bear it always," said Agatha. And her colour rose to the roots of her hair. Would he catch her meaning?

If he did, he took no notice of it—simply passed it by, and in answer said—

"I hope not—I should like, before I die, to become possessed of it: I have always had that idea, since I was a youth. My mother implanted it."

"But—could you—can you—would it not take a long time to"—

Bryan rose, and he laughed awkwardly as he said, in a manner he tried to make appear off-hand—

"I am afraid it will, Miss Whaite; but we must leave that matter at present. We shall certainly not have time for our game unless we begin at once. And if I eat one more morsel, I shall not be able to take anything later."

Until that moment, Bryan had been trying to carry out his self-imposed programme; but he had suddenly experienced a revulsion of feeling, a sense of self-disdain had taken possession of him, also there had recurred to him that sensation as of being entangled in a net which had come upon him after reading his mother's note.

Agatha rose from her seat too, but with an audible sigh: it had been very pleasant, having a *tête-à-tête* with Bryan, and pouring out tea for him.

It was already getting almost too dusk to see the balls over that rock-bound lawn; but the two began their game. Agatha was a much more accustomed player than Bryan; but notwithstanding that, they kept pretty equal. They had played two "sets," and were engaged on the third, when Agatha, who had just announced that she was "forty-love," in running to get the next ball, slipped on the grass and fell. It is possible, nay probable, that had she been playing with any one else, she would instantly have sprung to her feet. As it was, however, seeing Bryan running round the end of the net in order to come to her assistance, she lay where she was.

"I hope you have not hurt yourself," he cried as he ran to her.

"No, thank you—I think not," she said, as he helped her up. "You will think me very clumsy, I am afraid," she went on; "but I think I must have hurt my ankle a little on Sunday night—it feels rather weak."

"And I am afraid that was my fault," said Bryan, feeling exceedingly uncomfortable, for Agatha was still leaning upon him, and he heard footsteps.

Indeed just as Bryan ceased speaking, Mr. Whaite was passing the opening. He saw the two and stopped—

"Oh, you are there, are you?" he said, a little drily, Bryan thought.

"Yes, papa," said Agatha, advancing towards him, still leaning upon Bryan's arm. She did not offer to explain this, so Bryan felt he must.

"Miss Whaite has had a fall, I am sorry to say," said the young man, as he shook hands with the elder one.

"We were having a game, and she slipped on the grass."

"You should be more careful, Agatha," said her father; "it's not the first time you've done it."

It was hardly perceptible, but still a close observer might have seen Bryan's brows arch a little at this. Possibly the partial slip on Sunday night had nothing to do with Agatha's fall to-day. They walked slowly to the house, Agatha limping the least little bit, Mr. Whaite glancing at her now and then. What was in her heart was becoming pretty plain to him ; and he had not quite made up his mind about it. She did usually have her own way in everything ; and he supposed in this, if she really had set her mind upon it, she would eventually have the same. But with her prospects, Agatha ought, he felt, to marry a man of wealth and position, and not one such as Bryan Dean. Certainly she would have plenty of money for both ; but the proper thing was for two full purses to go together. Still, Bryan had his advantages—he was a fine, handsome fellow ; he had no vices ; he would be no spendthrift, to fling away his wife's money ; and he belonged to one of the oldest families in the county. Mr. Whaite would think about the matter, he said to himself. It never once occurred to him to question Bryan Dean's view of it.

Zillah was found comfortably curled up on a couch near the fire in the drawing-room. She was a luxurious little soul, and greatly enjoyed the creature comforts of Undercragg. She did full justice to the "high tea" which was now served. It was rarely that grouse or game of any kind found its way on to the table at Higher Dean Cottage, being much too dear in Mrs. Dean's eyes ; but in season it was rarely absent from that of Undercragg, and it was a favourite dish of Zillah's. She was very merry and bright, much more so than any of the others. In their different ways, Bryan and Agatha were feeling too deeply for much talk, and Mr. Whaite was

naturally a man of few words. But he seemed to enjoy Zillah's chatter, and smiled gravely at her sallies.

After tea they had music. All the young people played and sang "a little,"—Bryan, indeed, had a fairly good baritone voice,—but music was not a special *forte* with any of them. Part of the evening, Zillah played draughts with Mr. Whaite, and Bryan and Agatha were left at the piano together, the latter sometimes playing the accompaniments for the former. To Bryan the time began to drag terribly, and he would fain have been excused remaining to the "light supper" which was served at ten. But Zillah would take no hint—she did not mean to go home without supper. It was therefore close upon eleven before they left, Mr. Whaite reading in his daughter's face what she expected of him, namely, the according to Bryan an invitation to come "any time" to Undercragg, and always to call and have tea on his way from Baleborough, if Zillah were up there.

The brother and sister had very little to say to each other, as they wended their way homewards. Zillah's spirits had evaporated, and she was getting tired, and Bryan's mind was full of tumultuous thought.

It was a brilliant moonlight night, and the valley formed a lovely picture in black and white. All was very silent,—there seemed to be nobody stirring but themselves,—only the flow of the beck and an occasional rustle of leaves could be heard, softly breaking the solemn silence. It was the kind of night to make puny aims seem more puny. They reached the cottage at length; and as usual, when they were late home, they went round to the back door. Bryan gently opened it, and as he did so, a scraping sound was heard. His mother and Rebecca had gone to bed, and left a chair behind the door.

A low light was burning in the lamp on the sitting-room table; Bryan turned it up, and then he saw something white reared against one of the ornaments on the mantelpiece. He took it in his hand—it was a note addressed to his sister, and he rather wondered to find the envelope open. His heart gave a great bound—it would be the invitation to Edge House.

“Zillah, come here,” he called out, “and see what this is.”

Zillah was sleepily taking off her boots in the kitchen; but she came quickly along the passage. She, too, guessed what “this” would be. She took out the missive from its cover, and found it as she had supposed, the note giving the day for the little social gathering at the Farrars. It was written by Fanny, and named “to-morrow.” She hoped both Zillah and Bryan would be able to go to tea; but if Mr. Bryan were too late from Baleborough, he must come as soon as he could afterwards.

Zillah read the latter words with a bewildered feeling,—Bryan never went to Baleborough on a Wednesday,—then she glanced at the top of the sheet, which she had not done at first, and saw the date; it had been written the previous day, and “to-morrow” meant “to-day.”

With a vexed exclamation, Zillah threw the note down.

“It is too bad,” she cried; “we ought to have had this yesterday. I wonder where it has been?”

Bryan took it up and read it, though he knew, from Zillah’s face and speech, how the matter stood.

He did not wonder much how it happened, however; and even Zillah had a pretty shrewd inward guess. No doubt his mother had purposely kept the note back; and a sharp feeling of anger rose in his breast against her, along with that of bitter disappointment. The strength

of the latter feeling aiding in the revelation, fast becoming clear to Bryan, that Joyce Warwick—even though he had, as it were, known her only a week—had become the dearest to him of any of God's creatures.

When he spoke to his mother about the note the following morning, she did not attempt any denial of what she had done, but justified it.

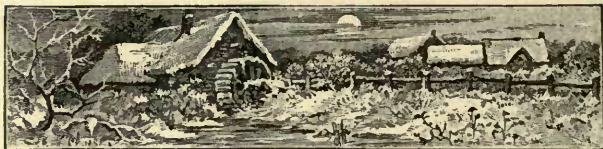
"You couldn't be at two places at once," she said; "and I knew, if *you* didn't, which you ought to choose. After Zillah had gone to Undercragg this morning, I opened the note; and when I found it was for to-day, I sent a message to the Farrars for you both—that you were sorry, but you were previously engaged."

"But, mother," expostulated Bryan, "that was not true."

"It was, in a sense," said Mrs. Dean; "you know the likelihood of it was discussed on Sunday."

"Yes—for Zillah," said Bryan; adding, "and if you sent one note of invitation on to the station to me, you ought to have sent the other, mother. Remember I am not a child, and I must decide upon matters for myself;" and he left her, with more of resentment in his heart towards her than at one time he would have thought possible.

Mrs. Dean saw something of this feeling in her son's face; and registered it in her account against Joyce.



CHAPTER VI

IN DEAN HOLLOW

“Experience teacheth us
That resolution’s a sole help in need.”—*Shakespeare.*

“She knew—
For quickly comes such knowledge—that his heart
Was darken’d with her shadow.”—*Byron.*



THE great moor at the head of the valley or dean dipped down somewhat suddenly, and in a rounded form; and that part of it had thereby become known variously as “Dean Hollow” or “T’ Scoop.” It was a wild spot, and on it or in it grew nothing but heather, gorse, and bilberry bushes. Two or three runlets gathered their waters on its breast, and formed at the bottom the beck which flowed through the valley.

On the Saturday afternoon following the Tuesday of which we have spoken, Bryan Dean, greatly disturbed in mind by reason of conflicting feelings and inclinations, set out for a long stretch on the moorland above the valley. Possibly he had an undefined idea—a latent hope—that alone, in the recesses of nature, he might imbibe something of her calm and peace. At anyrate,

by means of the physical exercise, he might rid himself, to some extent, of the miserable restlessness which had taken possession of him. He released Bingo, the big mastiff in the mill-yard, from his chain, knowing well that, however he himself fared, his dog would enjoy the run.

Mrs. Dean came out to the garden gate when she saw the dog rush past: a hope striving to find lodgment in her breast.

"Are you going down to Undercragg?" she inquired, when her son came up. Zillah had gone thither in the morning.

"No, mother; I am going up on to Hawk's Moor," said Bryan. "I want a long walk."

"You are not going to"—began Mrs. Dean anxiously.

"I have no intention of going anywhere," interrupted Bryan impatiently, knowing well where she meant, "beyond where I have said." His feeling of irritation against his mother had not yet entirely subsided, and she was not wise in again touching the sore.

"You'll be back to tea?" asked Mrs. Dean.

"Very likely, but don't wait," said Bryan; "I may not, if I get far away," and off he went round the corner, where Bingo was waiting for him, Mrs. Dean returning to the house with a frown on her brow.

Bryan and his dog meantime briskly took the road up the valley. They passed the rough lane leading to Dean Head Chapel, and Bryan looked wistfully up at the Chapel House, whose gable only he could see from that point. Before that, and on the other hand,—the left,—they had passed the road leading to Royden Edge and Edge House, and Bryan had been reminded of his disappointment in connection therewith. On for another

two miles they went, until every house and farm and mill had been left behind, and the trees, which had become more and more sparse, ceased altogether. Then, leaving the cart-road to the left, Bryan and his canine friend entered on a narrow rough foot-track which skirted the steep sides of "The Scoop," as it was oftenest called, and lost itself on Hawk's Moor above. It was just the afternoon for hilly scenery, not too bright and not too dull. Every moment changed the view; for a brisk breeze stirred masses, big and little, of cumulus clouds, whose shadows travelled quickly over the bosom of the moors and hillsides. One moment the sun would shine forth in strength and power, the next it would be hidden; thus there was, to the observant eye, an ever-varying natural kaleidoscope.

At another time, Bryan Dean would have keenly and pleasurably noted all this—now, however, I am afraid he was too much preoccupied. Still, the beauty of the scene, and the sweet, fresh, moorland air, and the exercise, had their effect upon him, and lessened, at anyrate, the pressure of his troubles and difficulties.

He left the path by and by, however, flung himself down on the bilberry-stalks, and set himself to think. It was of no use shelving the matter; as far as he himself was concerned, he felt that he ought and must come to some decision. Certain questions pressed upon him which required answering. A sudden, an unexpected crisis had arisen in his affairs, and must be faced. His whole after-life would depend upon his action now.

A key to his life's difficulties—the "Open Sesame" to the attainment of the family ambition—had, as it were, been thrust into his hands; and his fingers were falling nervelessly from it. Should he not brace himself to

grasp it, as his mother wished? Should he not nerve himself to the effort required of him, even at some self-sacrifice? Was it worth while, for mere feeling's sake, to give up so much? Would it not be easy, at so early a stage, to quench feeling?

Long he sat, pondering the matter, first swayed this way, and then swayed that—gratified ambition, family pride, a life's wish fulfilled, now bearing down the scale, and anon, love, personified in sweet Joyce Warwick, sitting triumphant, while all else combined in the other scale, kicked the beam, so light and valueless did they seem in comparison.

But love was newly born, and, though strong for his age, could hardly compete with another feeling of many years' standing and growth; and Bryan Dean concluded—finally concluded, so he told himself—that he would, that he must let love go. It was a bitter thing,—he knew he should suffer,—but time would bring healing, and the advantage to be gained would bring compensation. He would yield to his mother's wishes, to the urgings of his own ambition—he would marry Agatha Whaite. With his new-made resolve, Bryan Dean sprang to his feet; Bingo also, who had been lying with his head on his paws, intently watching him, and doubtless ruminating as to what was so seriously occupying his master's mind.

But the dog and his master had not taken many steps ere the latter, who was roaming about in eccentric circles, emitted a short bark, and set off running down the Scoop. Bryan turned his head to seek the cause of this, and saw, far below him and at some distance, two or three figures. They were entering the Hollow from the other side. Bryan stood still and watched them. He thought at first

they were children ; but when a passing cloud left the sun unobscured, he saw that one, at least, was an adult, and, by her garments, a woman. Could it be—was it Joyce Warwick ?

After the resolution he had formed, the momentous decision he had just arrived at, Bryan Dean ought, if he had acted consistently, there and then to have fled at his utmost speed up and away on to the highest part of the moor. But when are men in love consistent ? or, for the matter of that, men who are not in love ? Bryan's pulses quickened at the bare possibility ; and instead of speeding up the moor, he followed fast at Bingo's heels, down the Scoop, every moment more and more sure that the figures he saw were those of Joyce and her little brother and sister. He had not altered his resolve—oh no, of course not ! but—but just for this afternoon—if it were they, he would give feeling a little gratification—give love a kind of farewell feast. It was running headlong into danger, and he ought to have known it ; but, knowing it or not, down he went, metaphorically and literally. And Bingo, getting an idea into his fine head that a race had been entered upon between himself and his master, and becoming excited thereby, now and then emitted a short, breathless bark as he stopped to see the position of his rival, and then bounded on again, with his tail flourishing high above the bilberry-stalks.

A shrill little shout from below soon made known the fact that, at anyrate, Bingo had been recognised.

It was Jack's voice, soon joined by Jill's, as the dog, considerably in advance, bounded into the midst of the little group of three. Bingo knew the children well, and received their caresses with many wags of his tail,



Yes He would
yield to ambition,
and marry Agatha

looking up, meantime, at his approaching master with open mouth and panting breast, as much as to say, "I'm first!"

"This is an unexpected pleasure," cried Bryan, advancing with extended hand towards Joyce, his eyes radiating the delight he felt.

The two shook hands—Joyce conscious that she coloured a little, and feeling shyly happy at this *rencontre*, in spite of herself and of several counts she had against Bryan.

"I came out for a solitary ramble," continued Bryan, "and here I come upon you!" The "you" was emphasised in tone and look, and was plainly meant for Joyce alone, though he turned immediately and spoke to the children.

"You must not let us interfere with your ramble," said Joyce with some spirit. She recalled what she had heard about Bryan and Miss Whaite; she also remembered Tuesday, and Bryan's failure to put in an appearance at Edge House—a failure she, however, had been prepared for, having met Rebecca on the way there, and been told that "our young folks" were going to Undercragg; but the preparation had not prevented a feeling of disappointment, whose depth Joyce did not like to fathom.

There was a certain something in Joyce's tone which made Bryan turn, to look at her questioningly.

"You don't think—you cannot believe that I would rather be alone?" he asked. "You will not send me away?"

Joyce gave herself a mental shake, and answered with a laugh—

"If you really want to stay with us, I suppose you must; but you'll have to help to gather bilberries—won't he, Jack?"

"Oh—yes; I'll promise to do that," said Bryan; "I'm a first-rate hand, I assure you. But isn't it rather late in the season for them? I thought they were over."

"So they are," said Joyce; "and I told the children so; but nothing would do but we must come. The results so far are splendid. Behold!" and Joyce held out for Bryan's inspection the contents of a little basket she carried. At the bottom of it there lay what looked like three little blue-black beads.

"One each!" laughed Bryan.

"Yes," said Joyce; "the nucleus of the pudding."

"You ought to be glad to have another hand," said Bryan with mock gravity; "matters look serious for the pudding."

"Perhaps I shall be when I see the result," answered Joyce mischievously; "but there will be none, so long as we stand here talking."

"It is quite early yet," said Bryan, drawing a deep breath of content, and lifting his hat from his damp brow that the cool air might blow upon it. He felt at that moment that he could stand there for ever—with Joyce. He thought she looked more beautiful than ever: her simple straw hat was pushed back, the sunlight caught her silken curls, which escaped therefrom, her face was slightly flushed,—partly from physical, partly from mental causes,—and in her eyes, and in her manner, shyness strove with her natural brightness and buoyancy, and gave her an added charm.

For Joyce, it was an equal happiness to be near Bryan. But dared she give way to it? She did not know, she could not tell. All was a puzzle to her, and entirely inconsistent—one thing with another.

"Jack—Jill! if you ever mean to fill the basket, you

must give up playing with Bingo and go to work again," cried out Joyce. "See, I shall set you the example," and down she stooped, hiding her face from Bryan.

The young man bent down too, but over the bushes very near to Joyce. If he found one berry, he carried it immediately to the basket, as did the children, amid much fun and laughter—Bingo frolicking about amongst them and enjoying the search as much as they.

"Oh dear!" cried Joyce, at length, suddenly sitting down amongst the stalks; "I do believe my back will be broken before we find enough."

"You'll have to effect a compromise and have a tiny tart made," said Bryan, giving up work too, and dropping down instantly by the girl's side; "for I believe my back is in about the same condition," whereupon they both laughed.

Jill at this moment came running with one bilberry between her finger and thumb and carefully placed it in the basket on her sister's lap. The berries still barely covered the bottom of the little receptacle.

"If I were you, I'd take the basket," said Bryan, addressing the child; "it would save considerable labour."

"May I?" asked Jill, extending her hand for it.

"If you promise to be very careful, and not upset it and lose them all," said Joyce.

The promise was given, the basket received, and the child, with Bingo, turned away.

"I would try a little higher, if I were you," cried out Bryan. "I fancy you'll find more berries there."

The child went her way, and Bryan and Joyce were thus practically left quite alone, seated side by side, in that wild and secluded yet beautiful spot. For a few

seconds they sat perfectly silent, gazing before them down the valley. But at this point the view was very circumscribed, the shoulder of the hill, on the other side of which stood Dean Head Chapel, almost filling up the gap.

"It seems like sitting in a big green cup," said Joyce at length, fighting against the shyness which hitherto had precluded speech.

"It is simply—glorious," said Bryan, pausing for a word which should be sufficiently expressive.

Then they were both silent again — Joyce slowly stripping bilberry-stalks of their little green and red leaves, and Bryan watching her pretty hands engaged in the operation, and glancing now and then at her down-cast eyes.

"*This* compensates for Tuesday," said Bryan by and by. He spoke in a low tone, and more as if thinking aloud than addressing any one, but the effect upon Joyce was electrical—her face and neck flushed rosy-red. What could he mean?

"I was so sorry—so disappointed," he went on, bending forward that he might the better see Joyce's face. "There was a misunderstanding about the time—and I did not know that Tuesday had been fixed until too late. I had no opportunity of making a choice."

A sudden light in Joyce's eyes was a revelation, as was the relieved way in which she said, naïvely enough, and quite unconscious of what her words implied—

"Then you really meant to come to Edge House, Mr. Bryan?"

"Of course I did—Miss Joyce—did you doubt it?" he added.

His heart was beating wildly. Had Joyce really

cared, and been disappointed, too? Her whole manner as well as her question might be thus construed.

What Joyce would have answered — what further would have been said — what advances made on the dangerous ground the two were treading, I know not — for, at that moment, Jack and Jill came flying down the Scoop, with Bingo circling round them, and with the startling intelligence that they had found no less than “six bilberries”!

Joyce sprang to her feet and took the augmented basket from Jill’s hands, thankful to have been saved from a very embarrassing situation; and Bryan sprang to his, with such an admixture of joy and despair and perplexity in his breast as is the portion, let it be hoped, of few men.

It was joy, joy unspeakable, to think that Joyce cared for him; it was despair to link that with what he had resolved to do; it was unutterable perplexity, because his heart and mind were at sea once more, not knowing which haven to take—that of love or ambition. He and Joyce had no other *tête-à-tête* that memorable afternoon. But when the bilberry gathering was concluded, and with tired limbs and blackened fingers they, with the two children, arrived at the Manse with about a gill of the fruit, there remained little doubt in the minds of either of the love of the other.

“It must just be gossip,” said Joyce to herself, whenever her mind reverted to what she had heard about Bryan and Miss Whaite. But in present happiness that young lady was well-nigh forgotten, for the time. She was disappointed that Bryan would not stay for tea at the Manse, and scarcely understood it. But, truth to tell, the young man’s mind was in too great a ferment for society.

"Where is Zillah to-day?" asked Mrs. Warwick, as Bryan was taking leave.

"Oh," said Bryan, in a manner which he tried to make off-hand, "as usual—at Undercragg."

"Where you will follow her, I suppose, by and by," said Mrs. Warwick, with a meaning smile, "as usual, too."

Bryan coloured uncomfortably; and Joyce turned away her head and looked out of the window lest any one should see her face, for were it in tell-tale guise, as it often was, it would reveal a dreadful sinking of heart.

"I have been hearing something about you, Mr. Bryan," went on Mrs. Warwick. "Must I congratulate you?"

"You hear something about everybody in this valley, don't you, Mrs. Warwick?" said Bryan with a strained smile. "I am not aware, however, that there is anything about me calling for congratulation."

"I am a little premature, that is all, I fancy," said Mrs. Warwick, noting Bryan's rising colour.

"Decidedly premature, I assure you," said Bryan, wishing himself well out of the house.

"Ah, well, we shall see," said Mrs. Warwick.

Bryan thought Joyce's manner decidedly cold when he took his leave, and he inwardly anathematised gossiping tongues.

As soon as he had gone, Mr. Warwick came in from his study, and tea was partaken of.

"I am sorry Mr. Bryan didn't stay," said the minister, when he was told of the meeting in Dean Hollow. "I heard his voice, and took it for granted he would remain."

"He has other fish to fry, you know, my dear," said Mrs. Warwick. "Have you forgotten what Absalom told us the other day; and he had it from his sister-in-law."

"Well, it would be an easy way—an easy way," said Mr. Warwick reflectively.

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Warwick impatiently.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Warwick, "I must have been thinking aloud"—he had a habit of doing so, sometimes. "I—I—don't think I ought to mention what—was in my mind."

"What nonsense," said Mrs. Warwick irritably. "And nobody here but your own family!"

"Well, my dears, see that it goes no further, that is all. What I was thinking was this: that if Bryan Dean married Miss Whaite, it would be an easy way to the gratifying of his great desire, which is to reinstate the family in their old home—Dean-Hurst. It is his one ambition in life, he told me so himself. I hope the young man will achieve it."

"I don't think that's any secret," said Mrs. Warwick, a little contemptuously.

"As far as I am concerned, it is not a thing to be talked about," said Mr. Warwick, speaking very decidedly. "Mr. Bryan told me in the course of a confidential conversation, the very last time he was here—so I wish, and insist, that it go no further."

It had gone quite far enough—right down, in fact, into the heart of his own Joyce. The knowledge of this ambition of Bryan's was as a poisoned arrow lodging there, and draining it of hope and joy and life. Since he had spoken of it to her father, it must be true that he

entertained it. If that were true, in all likelihood the other story was true also. Each seemed a correlative of the other.

As Joyce rose from the tea-table, her father noticed that she looked pale.

"You have been too far, and done too much this afternoon, Joyce, my dear," he remarked kindly; "if I were you, I would go and rest an hour in your room."

Joyce inwardly blessed him, in her heart. She wanted nothing so much as to make her escape. She did not lie down, however, when she gained her room, but flung herself into the window-seat, whence she could see the roof of Higher Dean Mill; and she gazed down upon it with longing, loving, sorrowing eyes. She dwelt in memory over every word and tone and look of Bryan's during the afternoon, and she could only arrive at one conclusion—he loved her, or was in danger of doing so—indeed, felt himself in danger. And that was why he had not stayed this evening. His ambition must make his choice for him. He would never let his heart go to the daughter of a poor minister. He must marry a girl with money. Yes—she saw it all now, as plainly as possible. She, Joyce, had come in, as it were, inopportunely, and was in danger of spoiling his plans. He was attracted by her to some extent—but she interfered with his ambition. He would allow himself to go so far with her, but no farther.

Both love and pride were up in arms as Joyce considered these things; and both pointed to the same object of attack—namely, self. She loved Bryan too much to be a clog upon him. He was all that heart could desire—he ought to be in the front rank of men—he ought to take the old position of the family—it was

his rightful place. Yes, she loved him—she was afraid she loved him, impossible as it would seem to be in this short time—but, because she did so, she would repel him, and not allow him, if even he wished it, to cast ambition aside for her sake. Pride also took the same side; for if—though it seemed unlike him—but if Bryan Dean thought that he could play with her feelings—make love covertly to her while paying his suit to Agatha Whaite, he would find himself mistaken. Yes, indeed! But, in any case, her course was clear—she would repress and hide, and if possible exterminate, her own growing love; she would, by her manner, make Bryan Dean understand that she was nothing to him and desired to be nothing; she would—

“Oh, if I were only rich! if I were only rich!” was the wailing cry with which poor Joyce ended.

By the which the reader may judge how easy it would be for her to keep her resolves.



CHAPTER VII

A PLAIN SERMON

“In this word gold, are all the powers of the
Gods; the desires of men; the wonders
Of the world; the miracles of Nature.”—*Lilly*.

“Tempting gold alone
In this our age, more marriages completes,
Than virtue, merit, or the force of love.”—*Wandesford*.



FOR six months in the year there was no evening service at Dean Head. After September, until May came round again, the second service was held in the afternoon. And busy work had Absalom Rodley during that period, for the majority of the people constituting the congregation coming from considerable distances, came provided with lunch or dinner, in the shape of sandwiches, cake, etc., and the chapel-keeper was expected to heat the school boiler, set out tables and china in the lower room, and make tea and coffee wherewith to wash down the aforesaid viands. In the winter, therefore, Absalom had usually only what he termed “just a snatch and a bite” of the sermon; and if he had been specially interested in it, there was afterwards much shouting of

questions thereupon down his wife's ear-trumpet—for good Mrs. Rodley sat so near, and was so very attentive, knowing the need of strict attention, even with her trumpet to her ear, that she missed less of the discourse than most of the folk who required no scientific aid for their aural organs. She had also a very retentive memory, and could generally furnish her husband with the text, chapter, and verse, the heads, and all the minor divisions of the sermon.

"I missed t' third 'ead," Absalom would say, for instance. "I had to out an' see how t' watter were gettin' on; for if Mester Warwick had just been preychin' to 'em about patience, they'd blow me up, some on 'em, if t' tay weren't ready t' varry minute they were out o' t' chapel; eh, there's a vast o' difference, there is that, between hearin' sarmons an' practisin' 'em!"

This gathering in the schoolroom between the two services was, in fact, a sort of weekly tea-meeting, but without the public speaking—of private speech there was no lack, and it is to be feared that it was not always "seasoned with grace." For people who led somewhat secluded lives, and did not often otherwise meet, it afforded too favourable an opportunity for a little gossip, to be let slip.—"Good Sunday as it was," as they would sometimes say, apologetically, when conscience pricked a little, after a discussion, perhaps, about "Mrs. Robson's new bonnet," or "Fanny Farrar's young gentleman," or "Mrs. Warwick's stand-offishness."

The latter lady always dreaded the return of the autumn and the "afternoon service." She would complain that, for six months in the year, she could never, on the Sunday, call her house her own. At anyrate,

this had been the case for the first year or two after her advent in Beck Dean. Not to mention the men, who, if they came, usually went into the study—one good woman would find that she wished to consult the minister, or the minister's wife, about something, and it would "save her a trounce" during the week to "step into" the Chapel House now; and another "didn't feel so well," or "was a bit starved, and thought she'd come into the fire"; while yet another would make no bones about it, but announce that she had come in "for a bit of a chat."

The previous minister's wife had allowed all this, looking upon it as part and parcel of the duties attached to the Dean Head Chapel House; but Mrs. Warwick regarded it as no such thing, and as soon as possible put a stop to it. In divers ways she let the people know that she considered their visits were very ill-timed; and it had required much skill on the part of Mr. Warwick to steer his ministerial bark clear of offence, in consequence.

Now, as a rule, no one intruded upon the privacy of the minister's family on the Sunday; but the consciousness that so many of the people were "about" always fidgeted Mrs. Warwick. She professed to her daughter Maud that she never felt quite sure, on these occasions, that there would be "no inroad from the heathens"; for such had she dubbed, from the first, the hearty, genuine, if somewhat rough, Northern folk constituting the bulk of her husband's congregation. Mrs. Warwick was entirely lacking, alike in the sympathy which would have led her to grasp and appreciate, under their rough exteriors, the sterling qualities of the people, and the sense of humour, which would have enabled her to

enjoy the quaintness and force of their idioms, and their general idiosyncrasies.

Of just a few, spite of her Southern prejudices, Mrs. Warwick entertained a different opinion—these, of course, constituting the more cultured portion of her husband's hearers. Amongst these, none was a greater favourite than Bryan Dean. She cared little for Mrs. Dean—she was too independent, too self-opinionated, too strong altogether for Mrs. Warwick, and had, she knew, not been sparing in her criticisms, in early days, of the household management of the Manse. She had no great opinion, either, of Zillah, but for very different reasons—she thought her selfish and vain, and tarred with the brush of the prevailing provincialism.

But of Bryan she was wont to say that he was “a perfect gentleman—almost the only one who attended Dean Head Chapel.” Of course the Farrars and the Robsons, and one or two other families, were “all right”; but the fathers frequently, and even the sons occasionally, might be detected in laches in their English.

From the remarks which Mrs. Warwick sometimes let drop in social circles, it was known that she and Miss Maud were very punctilious upon points of speech and behaviour, and some of their hosts and hostesses were rendered very uncomfortable thereby. They were not all so philosophical as rotund Mr. Robson, who remarked once—

“What does it matter how yo’ talk, so as yo’ say what yo’ mean? That’s the point.”

Robert Robson, his son, at the time when he had a sneaking *penchant* for Miss Maud, feared it mattered a good deal, and was made miserable for three days once

when, after a visit she had paid beneath the paternal roof, his sister Rhoda had reproved him for some glaring defect in a sentence he had uttered in Miss Maud's hearing. His mother found him afterwards "rooting amongst some old school-books"; and Rhoda laughed when she heard of it, and supposed that Robert must have been in search of a grammar. Possibly it had dawned upon him—a fact which at school he had but dimly apprehended—that the study of grammar had some connection with daily speech.

But this had happened, and had been all over, a year or two ago; for either young Robson had found the minding of his p's and q's altogether too troublesome, or he had been too greatly repelled by Maud Warwick's coldness. He had not, at anyrate, persevered in his suit, and had eventually become entirely heart-whole again.

On Joyce's reappearance at Dean Head, however, changed from a child of whom he had taken not the slightest notice into a beautiful young girl, Robert Robson had again become a victim to a heart-complaint. And I am afraid that at this period he had, from his coign of vantage in the gallery set apart for the choir—he being a member of that important body—more eyes for the minister's younger daughter than ears for the minister himself.

The Robsons lived "Cowley way," and always brought luncheon on Sundays, as did the Farrars, as a rule, from the opposite direction; but, except on "teaching days," which at Dean Head happened only every third Sunday—Bryan and Zillah both taught in the school—it had not been the habit of the Deans to do so. Mrs. Dean rarely "attended" more than once in the day, and Bryan preferred the walk to and fro, rather than the gossip and

lounge in the chapel-yard, between services. Zillah, however, occasionally stayed to lunch alone.

It was a dull day in November, and threatened rain, as the various units going to form the congregation at Dean Head wended their way thither. The top of the Scoop and Hawk's Moor were completely hidden in the clouds, and the nearer foreground was wrapped in fog. The outside atmosphere was altogether most uninviting—every building, tree, bush, dripping with moisture. Before they had started, Bryan Dean had suggested to Zillah that, as the weather was so miserable, they had better take luncheon with them—though it was not “a teaching day.” But Mrs. Dean, who in consequence of a headache was not herself going to chapel, would not hear of their doing so. Truth to tell, she was never easy in her mind when Bryan was anywhere near Dean Head. She did not care to have her dinner alone, she said—she had nothing for them to take—they must come home—and stay at home if the weather did not improve, etc., etc. And, as usual, she had had her way, though Zillah had pouted and grumbled, and Bryan had compressed his lips ominously.

As the sister and brother passed the bottom of Royden Edge Lane, the Farrar family were just coming in sight and soon joined them—Zillah and George Farrar, as a matter of course, soon dropping behind together and being lost sight of in the fog, sparring, quarrelling, falling in love with each other, in that odd, inexplicable way which some young people have. Fanny Farrar's *fiancé* was over from Baleborough spending the Sunday, and of course they, too, walked together; and Bryan was, in consequence, left with the elders of the party.

Mrs. Farrar, with all her good-nature, was an inveterate

gossip; and as she panted on her upward way, one little item after another was retailed for Bryan's benefit. He was not much interested; but he listened patiently, seeing that there was nothing which personally affected him. But all at once he pricked up his ears—Mrs. Farrar was talking about Joyce Warwick, and saying something, too, which made his heart at first almost stand still—and then bound on again madly.

"Yes—I suppose there can be no doubt about it," went on Mrs. Farrar complacently; "only, of course, Joyce is so very young—only eighteen, you know, on the sixth of October—I always remember her birthday, because it is the same as Fanny's—there are just two years between them."

"I don't think her father would consent to her being engaged yet—and she only just home from school," continued Mrs. Farrar, after she had paused for an instant to take breath—"not likely. But a young man more in love than Robert Robson, I suppose it's not possible to see. Rhoda and Rachel tease him to death, I believe—but they like Joyce immensely, and they have her there, or would have, two or three times a week. Folks used to talk, a year or two since, about Robert and Maud; but his sisters cannot abide Maud, and I think she gave him the cold shoulder, too—and I don't think Robert fretted very much. Rhoda told Fanny that he was only in love inches then, where he is miles, now."

It was really wonderful how Mrs. Farrar could chatter on as she did, and at the same time mount that steep, rugged road up to Dean Head. They had reached the gate now, and gossip must cease; but a trivial incident seemed to confirm Mrs. Farrar's astounding news: the Warwick family were just emerging from their garden gate, and out of the mist, in the opposite direction,

suddenly sprang Robert Robson, who instantly planted himself by Joyce's side. They had all passed into the chapel before Bryan, who had to wait for Zillah, could reach them.

Was this, then, the explanation of Joyce's recent coldness of behaviour? Had he alienated her, by his inconsistent, changeable, unreliable conduct? And had Robert Robson won her heart—once inclined to him, he felt sure—at the rebound? Like things had happened—he had heard of them—and he well deserved, he told himself, that such should be the case here.

And Bryan Dean's thoughts, as he pondered these things during the singing and prayer, were more gloomy than the day. Now, that he had apparently lost Joyce, he knew how much, how strongly, how deeply he loved her. His ambition seemed a poor, puny thing in comparison with his love. During the last few weeks, spite of that memorable episode in the Dean Scoop, Bryan had been diligently trying to nurse the former feeling, in accordance with his decision previously made. He had been the better able to do this, because, thanks to his mother's management, he had seen very little of Joyce Warwick, and a good deal of Agatha Whaite; and though his love for the former had held him back from making any decided advances to the latter, that young lady's hopes, we may as well say here, were blossoming apace—for, certainly, never before had Bryan been so gracious.

Bryan Dean must be excused if, on this particular Sunday morning, he did not enter very heartily into what some people term the "preliminaries" of the service—he was too greatly disturbed in mind—especially with Joyce—his lost love—before his eyes—Joyce who never once

glanced his way—indeed, purposely avoided doing so, it seemed to the distracted Bryan.

All at once the young man was roused to a sense of his surroundings otherwise—Mr. Warwick was taking his text—two texts in fact—and somewhat startling ones for him—

Ecclesiastes vii. 12—"Money is a defence." 1 Timothy vi. 10—"The love of money is the root of all evil."

"My dear friends," said the minister, "the two truths here set before us must, I opine, have been verified in the experience of everyone of us here present. Some there are, it is true, who would cavil at the first statement, who pooh-pooh the benefits accruing from the possession of money, and are particularly fond of the phrase 'filthy lucre' when speaking of it. But we may take it for granted, I think, that, regarding these people, one of two things is true—either they are not perfectly sincere, and would readily enough grasp the opportunity, did it come to them, of possessing more of it, or, from always having been well supplied with it, they have never felt the need of money; for those who have felt this need to any extent—those who have endured hardship through the want of it—know too well the truth of the text ever to decry money.

"'Money is a defence' in all the stages, and under all the circumstances of life.

"It is a defence to young life against the lack of the aliment needful to the building up of the physical frame, and the proper clothing and shelter thereof."—Here the minister drew a graphic picture of the street Arab, with his poor little thin, puny, unnourished body, with his ragged clothing and wretched home, and contrasted his

position with that of the child whose parents had ample means whereby to defend it from hunger and nakedness and cold.

“Money, too,” continued Mr. Warwick, “is a defence to the child against ignorance, lawlessness, and barbarism. Contrast,” said the minister, speaking evidently with deep feeling, “contrast the position of two boys, we will say—the one born in St. James’ the other in St. Giles’. While the former is under the care of a private tutor or at a preparatory school, the latter, uncared for, untaught, is spending his days in the gutter—though, thank God, much now is being done to remedy matters in respect of education. While the former is at Eton or Harrow or Rugby, having his mind and body exercised and trained, and his memory stored with classic lore, the latter is probably becoming initiated into the art of petty thieving, and into the use of vile language. And while the former is proceeding to Oxford or Cambridge, and being fitted for the service of the Church, the State, the Bar, the latter is graduating in crime, and becoming a candidate for the felon’s dock and the prisoner’s cell. It is money, and all that money brings in its train, which is a defence to the one youth; and it is the lack of money—in extreme cases like this, usually for several generations, and in the first instance probably the result of misuse of it—which leaves the other the prey of all these evils. Yes—‘money is a defence’ to young life.

“Then in middle-life, what a ‘defence’ is money!—From carking care—for with money a man can provide things honest in the sight of all men, can supply those dear to him with the comforts he desires for them, can view their future with complacency, even were he to be taken from them, knowing that, with money, they will be

safe from many of the ills of life ; from mean surroundings—for with money he may indulge in precious books, in works of art, in an altogether tasteful home ; from a monotonous existence—for with money he may go forth and see and drink in the many beauties and wonders of God's world—its mountains, its valleys, its lakes, its uprising fires, its descending waters.

“And, in old age,—when the springs of life slacken, when effort is painful, when the young age pushes aside, in its onward stride, the enfeebled frame, with its faltering steps,—more than ever, perhaps, then is it true that ‘Money is a defence.’ The necessities of life, the comforts of life, the peace, the essential rest of life then, as far as outward things are concerned, depend upon money. And, alas ! be it spoken, often the very friendships of life are dependent upon it—the penniless man being, as a rule, the friendless man.

“And now, my dear friends,” continued the minister, “it is because these things are so patent,—because the needs of civilisation are so many, and so various, and because money can so well minister to them,—that men are in such great danger of loving money, of depending upon it, of fancying it can do more for them even than it can ; are in danger of sacrificing their best interests, of uprooting their highest principles, of imperiling their immortal souls in order to get it. And these considerations bring me to the second part of my subject, founded on the Apostle Paul's statement that—‘The love of money is the root of all evil.’

“Money can give men the means of indulging in pleasure ; and many love it on that account, and will have it, at all hazards—wildly speculate, embezzle even ; the love of money thus becoming the root of recklessness and dishonesty—often of licentiousness, and the grossest immorality.

“Money can give men ease from care ; but some men love it so much that, in the pursuit of it, they, instead, load themselves with care, and the seeds of good are thereby choked in them. Even if they do not, in their greed of gain, permit their principles to become undermined,—which, alas ! too many do,—they allow business to absorb all their time, all their thoughts ; and even men who have once been sincere Christians, have thereby fallen away from grace.

“Money, again, gives men glorious opportunities of doing good ; but its possession so often fosters the baneful love for it, that the desire to share its benefits with others becomes gradually less, either actually or proportionately, with the means at disposal. We must all have known men—kind, helpful to others, generous in their younger days, when their possessions were comparatively small—who have gradually, as their purses have grown and swelled out, tightened instead of slackened the strings thereof. They are hardly conscious of the deterioration themselves, so insidious in its growth is this root of evil ; but it is there all the time, stealthily growing and hardening, and sapping the root of the love of goodness. With regard to money-loving, the word of God is never more powerfully true than when it states, that ‘The heart is deceitful above all things.’”

Upon many others of the different phases of money-loving, and upon its evil effects on the life and character, did Mr. Warwick further dwell—its production of selfishness, unscrupulousness, avarice, etc., etc. And most earnestly did he exhort his hearers to guard against the first young growths of this “love of money”—to uproot them, in God’s name and strength. Yea, to live so consecrated a life, with a soul so permeated with the love

of God and all good things, so given up to the service of humanity, that this sordid love could take no root therein, finding nothing on which to feed.

In conclusion, the minister said impressively : " Well may the apostle say, then, that 'The love of money is the root of all evil'—for because of it man will deceive his fellow-man in word, overreach him in deed, and secretly rob him ; men, and women too, will deliberately stand before God's altar, and dare to take vows upon themselves which they know are utterly false—neither more nor less than selling themselves for gold and lands ; and man will even, for the sake of this same gold, imbrue his hands in his brother's blood. May God, of his infinite mercy, forgive us, if any amongst us are secretly nursing this love, and give us the will and the strength to strike at its root in our hearts, and every day and every hour to fight manfully against it. Amen and Amen."

There is a good deal of hearing for other people in all congregations, and there was much mental fitting of caps going on as the minister proceeded with his discourse that morning. But there was one of the number, at any-rate, who placed the cap on his own head with shame and confusion of face ; and that was Bryan Dean. He would not admit, even for his own benefit or excuse, the plea of exceptional circumstances, and a certain romance which might be said to attach to the end he had had in view—justifying the means, some might say. He saw himself set forth as the mean, self-seeking, forsworn fortune-hunter, "standing at God's altar" by the side of Agatha Whaite—and he despised himself.

From that moment, Dean-Hurst seemed utterly worthless, purchased at the cost of his own self-respect



He heard
Mrs Warwick's
voice
close
behind



—regardless of the feeling in his heart for Joyce Warwick.

The service was over, Absalom opened the doors, the people moved out,—but very, very slowly,—and the sound of opening umbrellas, and sundry exclamations about the weather, penetrated into the aisles. The darkness had been deepening for some time, the white mists had rolled away, and had given place to pouring rain. A steady, heavy, persistent downfall did Bryan Dean and Zillah find, on reaching the door.

“Oh dear!” cried the latter, “I wish we had brought dinner with us; do look how it rains.”

“Stay and have some with us,” said good-natured Mrs. Farrar, who was close behind, and heard her. “I daresay we shall have enough,” and she glanced at both the brother and sister.

“You are very kind,” said Bryan with a smile, “but that is hardly likely, and we must not rob you in that way. Zillah had better stay, however.”

Zillah thought so too—especially as she would have George Farrar’s company during the meal.

Bryan was just putting up his umbrella, after the Farrars and Zillah had made a rush across the graveyard to the schoolroom, when he heard Mrs. Warwick’s voice close behind—

“You are never going home in all this rain, surely,” she said. “Come in with us and have a little dinner.”

Bryan could scarcely believe his own ears—but it was indeed, he found, a *bonâ fide* invitation, repeated by the giver with warmth when the young man hesitated. And to his astonishment, he found himself the next minute ushered into the Manse dining-room, and shaking hands with Joyce, who had preceded him. She had consider-

able command of herself, and so had he ; but they both coloured a little as they looked at each other—Bryan, thinking of what he had heard, and looking upon her as probably lost to him, feeling unutterable things ; and Joyce, spite of her resolution of renunciation, feeling that Bryan was as dear to her as ever.

During dinner Mrs. Warwick put a plain question to her husband—

“My dear,” she said, “whatever led you to preach that sermon about money this morning?”

The minister smiled. “Because I think we all of us need warning,” he said. “But probably,” he went on, “it was partly owing to irritation about our lease.”—Mrs. Warwick, by this time, knew of the difficulty. “We make no progress, Mr. Bryan,” he said, addressing the young man. “Captain Crimsworth writes to say that he leaves these matters entirely with his agent. A personal interview might possibly have done some good, notwithstanding ; but the time will have run out before the captain returns to England, and the agent is inexorable. Our deacons say they will not submit to a rise of a hundred per cent. on the ground-rent, which is practically what he wants : and so things are at a deadlock.”

“It is a most unfortunate business,” said Bryan ; “but if the worst comes to the worst, we must hold the services elsewhere during the interval, and trust to a personal appeal to the captain. With the chapel standing empty and useless, he will hardly resist it, surely ; it is a very good thing the lease for this part of the ground”—that on which the Manse stood—“is a newer one.”

“But where *can* we worship?” asked the perplexed minister. “The schoolroom is, as you know, on the same plot as the chapel.”

“Well,” laughed Bryan, “if you and the congregation can put up with the smell of wool, and of brimstone, and of oil, and the general griminess, you may have the use of my warehouse for a few weeks. The forms could be brought down there from the schoolroom.”

“A good idea—a very good idea. Thank you, thank you very much,” cried the minister. And he was so pleased and relieved that he shook Bryan by the hand very heartily.



CHAPTER VIII

AN AFTERNOON AT DEAN-HURST

“His eyes have all the seeming of a demon’s that is dreaming.”
—*E. A. Poe.*

“What we love perfectly, for its own sake
We love, and not our own ; being ready thus
Whate’er self-sacrifice is ask’d, to make :
That which is best for it, is best for us.”—*Southey.*



SINCE Dean-Hurst had passed into the hands of the Crimsworths, it had usually been occupied by a younger son of the family. It had never been tenanted by the head of it, the paternal estate, Crimsworth Hall and Park, being in the same neighbourhood—only, in fact, four or five miles away. But it was a considerable time now since any of the Crimsworths had dwelt at Dean-Hurst. It had sometimes been let; but at the time of our story it was occupied by Mr. Scowcroft, Captain Crimsworth’s agent.

Had Dean-Hurst been situated in a neighbourhood frequented by tourists, there is no doubt that it would have become quite a show-place, as, besides being itself so picturesque a building, it contained many treasures, in the

shape of carved oak furniture and ancient portraits. With the idea of its redemption always in mind, these things had been allowed to remain in Dean-Hurst, and were now considered as part and parcel of the possession, and were inalienable from it.

When it had last been empty, now several years ago, the Deans had gone through it, and Mrs. Dean had not failed to improve the occasion. Neither had Bryan needed much the spur—the old place itself, the grim ancestors on the walls, the carven chairs upon which they had sat, the beds upon which they had slept, all making silent appeals to him. Zillah had been too young to be much impressed, and was never at any time so impressionable as Bryan, in things pertaining to the past; she being far more matter-of-fact. Still, she was highly pleased and interested when Agatha Whaite, after several times expressing a wish in Zillah's hearing to visit Dean-Hurst, one day early in December sent her a note saying that her father had arranged with Mr. Scowcroft, and the latter with his housekeeper, for her to be shown through it on the following day, Tuesday; and she would be glad if Zillah would accompany her.

Zillah handed the note to her mother, and the grim mouth of Mrs. Dean relaxed in a smile of satisfaction as she read it.

"I should like to go very much," said Zillah; "but"—

"Of course you'll go," said Mrs. Dean, refolding the note.

"But Joyce is coming to-morrow, you know," said Zillah.

"Send her back word," said Mrs. Dean.

"I don't like to do that again, mother—it would be the

third time. She's only been here twice since she came home in September," said Zillah, "and she never came less than twice a week before she went away."

"Well—you know the reason," said Mrs. Dean. "You can have her as often as you like—after," she added significantly.

"Oh—can I?" said Zillah, a little rebelliously. She could not help being fond of Joyce, and she did not like the present embargo. "But," she went on, "I don't know what to do about to-morrow—I do *not* like to put Joyce off again."

Mrs. Dean sat thinking. With a face like the Sphinx, her brain was busily at work. She had seen enough of Joyce to know something of the generous nature of the girl, and that she would be easily wrought upon by anything of romantic interest attaching to those she cared for. How would it be if she, too, were shown the past glories of the Deans, and a hint given to her thereafter that they were recoverable—in a certain way; a way in which she had no part or lot—except to stand aside in it?

"I wonder," she said, "if Agatha"—that young lady had begged that Mrs. Dean, as well as Zillah, would use her Christian name—"would object to your taking Joyce with you?"

Zillah looked astonished; she was not clever enough to follow the windings and workings of her mother's mind. The idea pleased her, however, and she said so. It certainly, too, seemed to be the best way out of the difficulty.

"I will write and ask Agatha if I may," she said, "and tell her how it is. I don't think she will mind one bit; and I'm sure Joyce would like to go. I can send Sam

up to Dean Head, to tell her to come down earlier, when I have heard from Agatha again."

And so it was settled. The groom from Undercragg was waiting for an answer, and Zillah's request was soon despatched. In little more than an hour the man was back again with his mistress's reply.

Yes, she said in her second note, she would be very pleased to see Joyce Warwick with Zillah, and also, if she would accompany Zillah and herself afterwards to Undercragg for tea.

This contingency had not been overlooked in Mrs. Dean's plannings; but she saw little danger in it. Bryan had visited Undercragg the previous Saturday, and she had never known him go there twice so near together. He might be depended upon not to call on the morrow, on his way from the station. Besides, she would tell Zillah that she and Joyce must leave very early after tea—they would then require no escort, but would be sufficient company one for the other. And of the intended expedition, no word was to be spoken to Bryan—the story of the visit to Dean-Hurst could afterwards be retailed to him as a "pleasant surprise." Joyce's share in it could do no mischief then. So far she, Mrs. Dean, had been very fortunate in her arrangements about Joyce's visits to Higher Dean—she had, as Zillah had said, only been there twice, since her return from Brussels, and both times it had been market-day, and Bryan away at Baleborough. True, he had escorted her home on his return; but Zillah had also gone, by prior agreement with her mother. Mrs. Dean guessed something of the conflict going on in her son's mind, and was in constant dread of the victory being on the side of Joyce. She did not as yet know of Bryan's self-conviction of the sin of

mercenariness, which, irrespective of Joyce, was leading him to the withdrawal of his heartless suit for the hand of Agatha Whaite. It would have to be done gradually, Bryan said to himself, so as to hurt Agatha's feelings as little as possible.

On the day following—Tuesday—at two o'clock in the afternoon, Agatha Whaite arrived, according to arrangement, at Higher Dean, to fetch Zillah and Joyce; and soon the three girls were speeding, in the Undercragg waggonette, down the valley towards Dean-Hurst.

"It was so kind of you to let me go with you," said Joyce, addressing Agatha. "I have so often wished, as I have passed it, that I could go inside."

"Zillah must be most pleased of all to go through it," said Agatha; "she has not been in Dean-Hurst since she was a child, it seems." "And I suppose, Zillah," she went on, turning to her, "that you would not realise then your special interest in it?"

"No, indeed I didn't," said Zillah; "I thought it was a dismal old place—that was about all."

The other two laughed at this characteristic speech of Zillah's, and she herself joined them.

"I recollect the portraits the best of anything," she went on; "and my mother telling me they were all Deans."

"What frights they are," I said to her; "whereupon I received a severe reprimand. In one of the worst-looking, she professed to see a strong likeness to Bryan, I remember."

It was impossible to help laughing at Zillah's description, though both her auditors thought that the defunct Dean could not have been so bad-looking as Zillah professed, if he bore the slightest resemblance to Bryan.

But they would, they reflected, soon be able to judge for themselves.

Arrived at the latticed gateway, the groom sprang down and pulled the bell there; and an elderly woman speedily came and opened it. Mr. Scowcroft was a bachelor, and this was his housekeeper. She must have been very tall in her young days, for even now, with her shoulders very much bent, she was far above the middle height. She had a pale, withered face, and her iron-grey hair was turned back under a full white cap. She wore a long, straight black dress, and altogether formed an appropriate figure for her surroundings, as she led the way from the gate to the huge nail-studded oaken door. This pathway was paved with diamond-shaped flags, as was the floor of the porch, which had stone seats, like those found often in the porch of an old church.

The door opened into a wide hall, or rather small square room, panelled with oak, and containing an oaken press or two, an ancient clock with a brass face, and a few pieces of armour. Out of this ascended a wide staircase, with a fine balustrade of black oak, beautifully carved. But the girls did not, of course, immediately ascend—the housekeeper, Mrs. Parker, conducting them first into the downstairs rooms.

Though it was winter, it was a bright, sunny afternoon, and a slight sprinkling of snow outside reflected the sunshine and made the rooms lighter than they often were in summer. But spite of this, the dark oak panelling which gave them an appearance delightful to the antiquary, rendered them anything but cheerful. A huge sideboard of black oak, in the dining-room, made Agatha Whaite sigh with a mixture of delight and envy. It bore in its centre panels, amid many ornamental scrolls,

the monogram "B. D." It was Agatha who pointed this out to Zillah and Joyce, before either had noticed it, or the housekeeper had had time to draw their attention to it. But Agatha looked at it with something more than delight and envy. Hope, strong hope had place in her breast, that she should soon restore this and other ancient family relics to the present B. D., and herself share in their glories.

And with eyes moist with unshed tears, Joyce glanced at Agatha, and felt that had she it at her disposal, she would have given the world to have been in her position—able to buy back this old domain, and lay it, with its priceless family treasures, at the feet of the man she loved.

In this room were the chief of the portraits; and soon Zillah cried out, pointing to one hanging near the centre of the wall opposite the fireplace—

"That is the one—that is the fright mother thought Bryan was rather like!"

"That is the third Bryan Dean," said the housekeeper, who seemed to be well up in the family history; "there is a story handed down that he was not very scrupulous, and was very high-handed, and that he added to the estate by unjust means."

"Oh!" exclaimed all three girls simultaneously, with long-drawn breaths.

"He may well be a fright," said Zillah.

"There is not the least resemblance to your brother," said Agatha, rather hotly; "he *could* not look like that."

Joyce said nothing; but gazed upon the portrait—fascinated. She did see a likeness—a strange one—a wonderful one—considering the interval of a hundred



"That is the third
Bryan Dean," said the Housekeeper.

and fifty years ; but it was not to Bryan,—except perhaps in the firm moulding of the chin,—it was to Bryan's mother, in her sterner aspects, and with an expression in her eyes which Joyce had once or twice caught latterly bent upon herself, Joyce, surreptitiously, and which had made her almost shudder. The look in Mrs. Dean's eyes had been instantly withdrawn ; but here, from the canvas, it was steady and persistent—a concentrated ray of dark, bitter hatred. The fascination with which Joyce's eyes were held to the eyes in the picture, was the fascination of horror.

“I wonder of whom he was thinking when he had that portrait taken,” said Agatha. “I should not have liked to have been in that person's shoes. His expression is positively malignant.”

“Mother couldn't have meant those awful eyes, nor that cruel mouth, when she fancied this Bryan Dean like our Bryan,” said Zillah. “She must have seen any likeness there is in the chin and general shape of face and the dark complexion—his nose is a wee bit like, too, when you examine it.”

“Let us go,” said Joyce, with a shiver ; and with a great effort, she turned her head away.

Agatha, however, was not ready to leave the dining-room yet ; and she and Zillah lingered, examining one or another of the portraits there, while Joyce and the housekeeper passed on into the adjoining room,—the library,—where Joyce sat down to wait, in a big oaken chair, the subject of an unusual depression. The long mullioned window here was in its upper part filled with stained glass, consisting chiefly of coats-of-arms with their mottoes and crests. They were those of the neighbouring old families, in this and the adjoining counties, with

which the Deans had intermarried. In the centre was their own, and over it the crest which Joyce so well knew, from having seen it so often on the Deans' silver—a raised arm bearing a sword, and in the act of striking. Beneath the shield, a scroll bore the motto: "*Per fas et nefas.*"

The housekeeper saw Joyce gazing at the window, and volunteered some information regarding it. Amongst other things, she said—

"Master says the Deans' motto, in English, is: 'Through right and wrong.'"

Joyce sat pondering it. What did it mean? That through right on their side, and wrong on the part of others, the Deans would fight their way? or did it imply that they would pursue their own object, cling to their own purpose, even if thereby they wronged others? Joyce could not tell; but she felt quite sure that Bryan Dean the third had been capable of the latter; and she shuddered again, as she thought of his eyes and his stern determined mouth. Determination seemed to be, indeed, a family trait, judging by the faces delineated on the walls of Dean-Hurst.

Zillah and Agatha came slowly into the library; and the latter took her stand before the old window, with eyes which seemed positively to devour this silent testimony to the long pedigree of the Deans. She, too, recognised the crest, and remembered the silver with a sigh of envy. Mrs. Parker again translated the motto.

"Why, I see the Deans have intermarried with the Aughtons," said Agatha, by and by, in an astonished tone. (The Aughtons had become a powerful family, and had been ennobled during the last century.) "I know

their coat-of-arms very well, for I have been through their place at Kirkton."

"Which is it?" asked Zillah, with some swellings of pride.

Agatha thereupon pointed out the Aughton shield, with a throb of pride herself—thinking of the future.

The little party next visited the drawing-room. It was a fine old room on the second storey—oak-panelled too; but there was a beautiful frieze above the oak, and a very handsome ceiling. But the centre of attraction was the fireplace and mantelpiece—the latter reaching to the ceiling, and ornamented with carving. Here also, in the lower panels immediately above the mantelshelf, were introduced divers coats-of-arms.

The furniture in this room, however, was modern; and there was a certain incongruity in it. The pictures on the walls were of a mixed character—engravings, water-colours, and two or three old portraits, also in water-colours.

"What a beautiful girl!" exclaimed Agatha, stopping in front of one of these. "She was not a Dean!"

Then laughingly she apologised and explained.

"I do beg your pardon, Zillah," she said. "What I meant was, that with her complexion she could not have been a Dean. She is quite a blonde, you see, and you are all so dark."

"She married one of the Deans," said the housekeeper. "I believe she was a Miss Saxon of Saxonthorpe."

"Indeed," said Agatha, much interested.

During this conversation, Mrs. Parker had been glancing first at the drawing and then at Joyce, and then again at the picture; and at this juncture she remarked, addressing Joyce—

"If you'll excuse my saying so, miss—I think the picture is a deal like you. Perhaps you are related to the Saxons?" The housekeeper knew the other two girls, but Joyce was a stranger to her.

"Oh, no I am not," said Joyce; adding, with a vivid blush, "and I am not half so good-looking as that girl."

"If you had your hat off and your hair done the same, it might pass for your portrait, miss, I assure you," said the housekeeper.

"Miss Warwick is darker—considerably," said Agatha, with a little frown puckering her brows.

"Yes, she is rather darker; but that seems to me about the only difference," said Mrs. Parker.

"I certainly see a little likeness, myself," said Zillah.

"*Please*—don't discuss me any more," remonstrated Joyce, with a laugh. She noticed that, for some reason or other, Miss Whaite was not pleased with the discovery of the resemblance.

"I have understood," said the housekeeper, with another glance at the picture, "that this lady was the wife of the last Dean who occupied Dean-Hurst."

"She had herself to leave it?" asked Agatha.

"So I understand," said Mrs. Parker.

"How I pity her!" exclaimed Agatha.

"Yes, it must have felt very hard," said the housekeeper, "especially as she had children."

"From one of whom Miss Dean here is descended?" said Agatha, indicating Zillah.

"So I suppose," said Mrs. Parker.

"How do you know so much about our family?" asked Zillah, whose interest had been greatly stimulated by what she had seen and heard.

"Oh," said Mrs. Parker, "my mother's family served them for several generations, and these things were handed down. When I was a girl of twelve or fourteen, I came here once with my grandmother, who had in her young days lived at Dean-Hurst many years; and she pointed out to me and explained the things I have told you to-day, and I have never forgotten them. When I came to live with Mr. Scowcroft, I could recall everything."

"How interesting!" said Agatha; and she made a mental resolve, that this descendant of a race of ancient retainers should become part of the reinstated household.

"Did we see—I don't remember it if we did—the portrait of my great-great-grandfather, the one who lost Dean-Hurst?" asked Zillah.

"I think I pointed it out," said Mrs. Parker; "but we can call in the dining-room again, when we go down, if you would like to see it."

"Only fancy," said Agatha, "this lovely young lady being your great-great-grandmother, Zillah!"

The bedrooms were visited and inspected, and in one of them, which was hung with tapestry, there was a very handsome four-post bed—even the back of it, as well as the posts and cornice, was of black oak, elaborately carved. "This is the only one of the Dean bedsteads here," said Mrs. Parker. "My grandmother called it the state bed; the original hangings were velvet, she told me; and nearly all the Deans, she said, had been born in it, died in it, and laid-out in it."

"I should expect to see a ghost if I slept in that bed," said Zillah, laughing; "though we've one at home that used to be here,—it is black oak too,—and it is not haunted that I know of."

"Both this room and the room over the library are said to be haunted," said the housekeeper, "and the corridor between."

"Oh, of course, there must be a family ghost in a place like this," remarked Agatha; "that goes without saying. What's the story about it?" she asked. "Did your grandmother tell you?"

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Parker; "it was a daughter of the Dean you noticed so much, who eloped with someone her father disapproved of. He found it out and pursued them, and brought her back; and some say he nearly killed her, others that he did kill her—smothered her. Perhaps she cried out a good deal, poor thing."

"And have you ever heard, or—seen—anything, Mrs. Parker?" asked Joyce, in a low, awestricken tone.

"I've never seen anything; but I've often heard what sounded to be footsteps above my head, when I've been in the library—the room above was hers," said the housekeeper. "And on wild nights," she went on, "I've heard a wailing sound, like someone sobbing and crying in the corridor; and it always seems to me as if this Cicely Dean might have been to her father's room, trying to move him to pity, and was coming back wailing and crying, because he would not consent to her marriage."

"Or perhaps it was the wailing after she was brought back," suggested Agatha. In her heart of hearts she thought it was probably rats which scampered above the library, and the wind which sobbed and wailed along the corridor; but a family ghost was too respectable a thing to possess, lightly to disturb it by any such hypothesis.

"What a wicked, wicked man that third Bryan Dean must have been!" were words which sprang for utter-

ance to Joyce's lips ; but they died away unspoken as the remembrance once again came to her of Mrs. Dean's eyes—so like his. Another remembrance occurred to her, too ; something that Rebecca had said of Mrs. Dean that Sunday night, in Absalom Rodley's cottage, namely, that she would “nearly sell her soul” for the repossession of Dean-Hurst. Would she ? Was she so eager for it ? And was that why she hated her, Joyce—because she feared she would come between her and her object ? Following this thought—the first glimmer of light on the subject—came the recollection of many confirmatory circumstances. Yes, it was so, she was convinced.

But Mrs. Dean need not fear her,—need not hate her,—Joyce. She would never interfere ; never stand between Bryan and his reinstatement in the home of his fathers ; she loved him too well for that. She had made up her mind before upon this point ; but the visit to-day had strengthened her resolution a hundredfold. Bryan must indeed marry Agatha Whaite, and make his home at Dean-Hurst, and refound his family.

Mrs. Dean, as you will see, my reader, had had true intuition when she decided to send Joyce Warwick to Dean-Hurst.

The girls had another peep in the dining-room, that they might distinguish the recreant Dean who had squandered the estate, and who had also been the husband of the girl they admired so much. They found him a handsome, but somewhat debauched-looking individual, about forty, with a weak mouth, and a much less decided chin than had been possessed by the majority of the Deans.

“They must have been a very handsome pair when they were married,” said Agatha.

"Yes ; it was a thousand pities he turned out to be so reckless," said the housekeeper.

Agatha said nothing in response to this. But for that man's recklessness she could never have hoped to stand in the relationship to the Deans in which she soon expected to stand.

It had turned half-past three, and was getting quite dusk, when the girls left Dean-Hurst. The groom had been dismissed, and they walked the short half-mile which lay between it and Undercragg.

"I wonder if your brother will call to-day?" said Agatha, as they stepped along the snow-sprinkled road.

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Zillah. "He knew I was coming to Undercragg. But, Agatha, he will be astonished," she went on, "to hear where we have been this afternoon ; I never told him."

"Why, how was that?" asked Agatha, who had been strongly tempted to include Bryan in the expedition.

"Oh," said Zillah, looking a trifle embarrassed, if the other two could have seen her plainly, "I thought I could tell him all about it afterwards, and astonish him a little."

"But," said Agatha, "I should have thought you would have been obliged to tell him, on account of your former engagement."

There was a pause ; then Zillah, being obliged in common politeness to answer, said—

"He knew nothing about that, either ;" adding, with assumed *nonchalance*, "I don't tell Bryan everything, you know."

They were descending the steep lane now, leading to the bridge across the stream ; and Joyce lagged behind a

little. Here was another confirmation of what she had thought.

Agatha pondered this matter too; and the first little seed of jealousy was sown in her heart. It was perfectly plain that Mrs. Dean and Zillah wished to keep Joyce out of Bryan's way. That being so, it argued some fear of her influence, and if they had reason to fear, so had she. Perhaps it was Joyce who was keeping Bryan back, and not her—Agatha's—superior wealth, or dreadfully humble origin.

But no, no; she would not believe it. She would not credit that anything could eventually prevent a man in Bryan's position availing himself of such an opportunity for reinstatement in such a place as Dean-Hurst. She herself felt more bent upon it than ever, now she had visited the place. She felt that even had she not loved him, she could have married Bryan to have become mistress there. She cast a backward glance at Joyce, but could not clearly distinguish her face. "Surely," she thought, "a little chit like this, just fresh from school, is not going to spoil everything!"

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A couple of hours afterwards, the Higher Dean gig, with Bryan Dean in it, and Sam, was approaching the junction of the main road with the Lower Dean Lane, when the latter, who to-day was driving, asked, with a jerk of his thumb towards the lane, whether he should run down there.

"Miss Zillah's up at Undercragg," said Sam, "an' Miss J'yce, fro' t' Chapel House, too."

Joyce Warwick at Undercragg! Bryan could scarcely believe his own ears.

"Aren't you mistaken, Sam?" he asked; "about Miss Joyce, I mean," he added.

"No," said Sam, "I seed 'em go; and I knows they haven't come back. T' waggonette an' Miss Whaite come for 'em, abeawt two o'clock."

"Oh!" said Bryan.

He thought a moment, and then said—

"You may turn down the lane, Sam."



CHAPTER IX

LOVE-MAKING

“There be none of beauty’s daughters
With a magic like thee;
And like music on the waters
Is thy sweet voice to me.”—*Byron*.

“Give unto me, made lowly wise,
The spirit of self-sacrifice.”—*Wordsworth*.



HAT evening, at Undercragg, after the visit to Dean-Hurst, was far from being a cheerful one to Agatha Whaite; for even Bryan’s unexpected presence there was by no means an unmixed pleasure, after she had heard how it had come about. Also as she noted, with the eyes of a newly-born jealousy, Bryan’s manner in the presence of Joyce Warwick. There was nothing in the least demonstrative in it,—nothing she could have described or explained to anybody,—but there was a certain difference in his speech and bearing when addressing her, which she could feel. It was the shy deference, the tender reverence of manner which, had she but known it, has but one source in the human heart—the truest, highest, strongest love.

Bryan, too, seemed by no means grateful for "the pleasant surprise" Zillah had for him in the relation of the girls' visit to Dean-Hurst.

"Why didn't you tell me you were going?" he asked her. "I could have told you of several things to specially notice."

"Perhaps you would have gone with us?" said Agatha. "Mr. Scowcroft himself fixed Tuesday; but I daresay another day would have done."

"Oh, I've been through several times in my life—it is not that, thank you, Miss Whaite; only it seems so odd of Zillah never to have spoken of your going."

Zillah pouted; she was physically tired, and rather cross. She didn't believe in bearing vicarious blame, either; but she was obliged to do so in this case, as she dared not say that her silence had been imposed upon her by her mother.

"I don't think you could have told us a thing more than Mrs. Parker did," she said, a little viciously; "she seems to know everything about us Deans, good and bad—mostly bad."

There was a general laugh at this.

"There's that horrid man that mother thinks you are rather like," went on Zillah. "I think he's gone worse-looking on the very wall. And he was such a bad one, that he has actually brought a ghost into the place."

"Well, somebody must have done it, of course," remarked Bryan, with mock gravity. "An old place like Dean-Hurst without its ghost would never do. I shall be sorry if you ladies corroborate my mother's opinion about the likeness, though; for, as far as my memory serves me, a more villainous"—

"It's not in the least bit like you," interrupted Agatha.

"I think it is—rather," said Zillah, with sisterly candour; "about the chin and nose especially."

"And—what is your opinion, Miss Joyce?" There was a decided inflection in Bryan's voice, though he still wore the same air of mock gravity, increasing it even to one of anxiety. "I hope, I do hope," he went on, "that you are not going to add—the eyes."

"God forbid!"

The words startled even Joyce herself as they fell from her lips—"sprang" therefrom would be the better term—sprang involuntarily, but earnestly, forcefully. Everybody turned to look at her, more or less astonished; and Joyce flushed crimson. For an instant no one spoke; then Bryan, whose pulses had quickened with pleasure, said—

"Thank you, Miss Joyce—that is kind."

She lifted her eyes to his while he was speaking, and again, as in Dean Head Chapel, an electric current of sympathy flashed from the one to the other.

Agatha Whaite caught the look, and noted the quiver and the fall of Joyce's eyelids. From that moment her hopes received a check. Well might Mrs. Dean scheme to keep Bryan and Joyce apart! She was indeed the stumblingblock in the way, there could no longer be any doubt.

Agatha offered no opposition, therefore, or a very faint protest indeed, to Zillah's insistence on leaving early. She had promised her mother, she said, to be home by nine o'clock.

"But that was before she knew you would have an escort," said Agatha.

"All the same, we had better go," answered Zillah decidedly; she knew well the state of mind her mother

would be in, knowing that Bryan and Joyce were together at Undercragg. And in her heart of hearts Agatha thought they had, and made no further attempt to detain them.

A slight frost had set in, and the thin layer of snow on the ground and shrubs glistened in the light of the silver crescent just seen above the hill behind, as the three guests left Undercragg. The drive, as I have said before, was necessarily steep, and the frost and snow rendered it slippery. Bryan at once, therefore, offered an arm each for the assistance of the two girls. It was the first time that Joyce had walked arm-in-arm with Bryan. They had little to say to each other, except a word or two upon the beauty of the winter's night. Like fairy-land were Mr. Whaite's grounds—each branch and twig and leaf of twinkling silver. Zillah, from her concern at the miscarriage of her mother's plans, was rather silent too. But, as it chanced,—if there be such a thing as chance,—the three were not together long; for just as they turned out of the Lower Dean Lane, someone was passing it on the highroad—someone who paused, and hailed them in a familiar voice, that of George Farrar. He was walking home from Beck Foot Station.

"Now, this is good luck," he said, with an admiring glance at Zillah, as he shook hands.

"You speak for yourself, of course," said that young lady, with a toss of her head. "We may look upon it differently."

"Oh," said Mr. George, "if that be it, I can walk on. Good-night all," and he took a few steps forward, alone.

"Come back, George; I thought you knew Zillah's bark by this time," called out Bryan, laughing.

The young man did not come back; but, with a laugh,

he waited until the others came up to him. And, by and by, he and Zillah, who had not again taken her brother's arm, dropped behind, and, walking more and more slowly, were afterwards mostly out of sight owing to the turns in the road.

Joyce had also withdrawn her arm to shake hands with George Farrar, and had been walking independently; but now a steep, slippery bit of road made walking difficult, and Bryan again offered his assistance. Joyce timidly placed her right hand a very little way on Bryan's left arm. Instinctively, Bryan's right hand was stretched out to draw it forward, and place it more firmly; and somehow, having once gained possession of it, he could not let it go. The action was entirely unpremeditated—the touch of Joyce's fingers was electrical—feeling came with a rush, and carried him out of himself.

But Joyce was frightened at the unexpected grasp, and the trembling of the hand which held hers—frightened lest she should lose command of herself. She tried to withdraw her hand; but Bryan's grip tightened.

"Miss Joyce—'Joyce' may I not call you," he began, "I am afraid I may vex you by my sudden action—but I cannot help myself. The impulse to speak has come, and I must obey it."

Bryan bent his head, and tried to look in Joyce's eyes, but they were veiled.

"I may be too late—I thought I was too late until to-night—when—when what you said about that portrait gave me hope. It seemed as if you cared, by the way in which you spoke. Your 'God forbid!' has been ringing in my ears ever since."

Bryan felt that a shiver passed through Joyce when he mentioned the portrait.

"Still," he went on, "I had no thought of speaking to you to-night—but—I—could not be near to you—*so* near to you, without feeling and knowing that you are all the world to me, Joyce—and—what is in my heart will have way. Say, darling, is there any hope for me?"

No music was ever sweeter to human ear than were these words of love to Joyce's heart. But she must turn a deaf ear to their sweetness. For Bryan's own sake, she must crush down, stifle, stamp out her own feelings; and by refusing to fan his with hope, lead to the like stamping out on his part.

Agatha Whaite loved him—that she had certainly found out. "Love begets love"; and in time, Bryan's heart, with nothing from her of hope and encouragement whereupon it could feed, would turn to Agatha. With Agatha and her large fortune, Bryan could win back his old home, refound his family, and take his proper place in society. And from some remote corner, some secluded nook in the world, she, Joyce, could look out upon his prosperity—see him on the magistrates' bench—see him in Parliament—see him possibly in the Cabinet—and feel that, by her own act of self-denial, she had had some little part in his elevation. She could not stretch out her hand to raise him, as Agatha could; but she could stand aside, and let another do it. She would never, never be a stumblingblock in his way.

But oh! the bitter pain, the anguish of heart, which Joyce suffered, as she flung from her the sweet draught of love held to her lips. With her heart full to the brim of a responsive passion, it required all the resolution of her young, generous nature to do it.

Bryan held her tightly, and was looking down at her, waiting, with trembling, for her answer. Somehow, not-

withstanding what he had heard about Robert Robson, he could not help cherishing a feeling of hope.

Joyce twice essayed to speak, but in vain. The third time, words came—spasmodically, painfully. “No,” she said, “no—I—I cannot—bid you hope; I—am very sorry—but—you—must not.”

“O Joyce!” came from the young man’s lips reproachfully. “I thought you did care a little.”

“Oh, yes—yes,” was wrung from Joyce, in spite of herself—“a little. I like you as a friend,” she went on, as a kind of cover; “but I cannot marry you. One must,” she said, almost hysterically, “have a great deal of love for a man to marry him.”

“I see how it is,” said Bryan bitterly. “Someone has stolen your heart from me while I have been—been—acting the fool!” He certainly ended the sentence differently from his original intention; but its meaning was the same. And Joyce knew perfectly what he did mean; and it helped her. Even, if he allowed his love to carry him away now, and she allowed herself to accept him, there might come a time, she reflected, when he would repent and regret what he had given up for her sake. But he should never, never run the risk. She made no reply to this assertion; and her silence seemed to give consent to it.

“I would have waited—I could have waited any length of time, with a grain of hope,” said poor Bryan, by and by; “but without it, life seems nothing but a blank.” He had released Joyce’s hand now, and it only barely touched his arm; but he felt a quiver in it as he thus spoke.

Did he love her so much, Joyce was asking herself, that all he could otherwise possess still left only a blank?

He thought so now. He was sincere, perfectly sincere, no doubt; but a year hence, a few months hence, he would think and feel differently.

"I am very sorry," again she murmured; but that was all. Even then, perhaps the hardest moment of all, when Bryan's sufferings, as well as her own, were patent to her, Joyce remained steadfast in her resolution, mistaken or otherwise, of self-sacrifice.

They walked drearily, silently along after that for two or three minutes, and were both glad when a call from behind stopped them. They had been walking very slowly, but the other two still more so; until all at once, after a loving squabble or two with George Farrar, Zillah had been somehow recalled to a sense of her duty as sentinel, and had requested George to shout to Bryan and Joyce to stop.

"I don't see why," said George; "let them go on."

"But we shall be at our gate directly," said Zillah; "and—I think—would you mind, George—seeing Joyce home; you have to go half-way, you know—and it would save Bryan's going."

"It strikes me, he won't want to be saved going," said George, who had his wits about him. "I rather think it's just as well that Robert Robson is nowhere about."

"Why?" said Zillah; "Joyce denies that there is anything in that."

"Well, I cannot be sure about her; but there certainly is on his side," said George.

"And as for—Bryan," went on Zillah, with some hesitation; "he is—he will be—he is next door to being engaged to Agatha Whaite."

George Farrar emitted a long-drawn "oh!"

"What do you mean by that?" asked Zillah crossly.

"Lucky fellow! Good-looking wife, and thousands upon thousands! He's to be envied—that's what I mean by 'oh!'"

"Very well," said Zillah, withdrawing her hand from her lover's arm—he was her lover; though they were not actually engaged, there was a kind of understanding between them—"very well—go and find another like her—you are quite at liberty, and there are more."

"I will begin to look about," said George. "Can you think of one you can recommend, Zillah?"

"Well," said Zillah, "you don't deserve any help from me—but there's Miss Walsden, for instance."

A longer-drawn "oh" than the first.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Zillah, as before.

"Well—I mean by that," said George, "Miss W. is—not fair—not fat—but forty—and I respectfully decline."

Two more heiresses, still more ancient, were mentioned by Zillah as likely for George's wooing; but their names were received in the same manner, and their persons criticised as severely.

"Then you must choose a wife for yourself," said Zillah, with a pout.

"I decline to do that also," said George.

"Well—you are a"—began Zillah.

"I decline for a very good reason," interrupted George; "because I have already chosen—you know I have—you little minx!" and he repossessed himself of Zillah's hand, given with apparent reluctance, but real delight.

A few blissful minutes, and then Zillah's conscience smote her again.

"But really, George, you must call out, or I must—or they'll be going past Higher Dean. And—I do want you to see Joyce home to-night. And—you are not to

say one word to anybody—mind that—about Bryan and Agatha Whaite—because it is not quite settled—and it would be so very, very awkward, if”—

“If there should be a slip betwixt the cup and the lip,” finished George for her, adding, “but surely, with such a cup, Bryan will be careful of any slip.”

“Well,” said Zillah, partly letting the cat out of the bag, “you can help him to be careful by”—

A long, low whistle showed George Farrar’s comprehension of the situation, without another word from Zillah, and he immediately sent up the valley road a loud “Hullo!”

They were almost close to Higher Dean Cottage, when the two couples again joined, Zillah professing to grumble at the speed at which Joyce and Bryan had been walking.

“There is no keeping up with you,” she said.

“You have tried very hard, of course,” said Bryan; whereupon all four laughed—two of them, Bryan himself and Joyce, very constrainedly: they were in no laughing mood.

When they reached the gable of the cottage, they all came to a stand, and Zillah inflicted a slight pinch on George Farrar’s arm, to remind him of his duty, whereupon—

“It is of no use your going any farther, Bryan,” said that young man obediently; “I can see Miss Joyce home—I have quite half-way to go, you know.”

If Bryan Dean had received a different answer to his question—if his sudden wooing had sped—he would have felt strongly inclined to kick George Farrar for what he would have considered his impertinence. As it was—he felt grateful to him. There seemed nothing more to be

said between himself and Joyce, and he wanted to be alone with his misery. He raised a slight opposition, of course; but Joyce herself overruled it. If Mr. George did not mind—that would be best. Indeed, she did not think she should be afraid to go on alone, beyond Edge Lane, where he would have to turn to go home. It was not at all a dark night, etc., etc.

Spite of what had passed, the hands of Joyce and Bryan instinctively lingered in one another as they bade each other "Good-night." Bryan thought it was Joyce's sympathy for him which made hers linger and tremble; and he pressed it hard, in a paroxysm of gratitude, and grief, and love.

As Joyce and George Farrar passed up the valley road, the crescent moon no longer rested on the hilltop, but like a silver boat full-launched in the sea of blue above, seemed as if making for one of the groups of silver islets forming the constellations. They were out in splendid form to-night—Taurus, with the Pleiades; the Plough, with its glistening arched handle; Orion, with his belt and sword of clustered gems. They had been visible before; but Joyce had not seen them—neither had George Farrar. Now their eyes were set at liberty as it were, and the glories of the heavens were revealed to them. Joyce looked up from the very necessity of the case—she felt that she must rouse herself; it would never do to walk, a mute, by George Farrar's side, though she had just passed through a crisis in her life—a crisis leaving her crushed and wounded, and maimed for the whole natural term of it, as it seemed to her. She looked up, as I have said, casting about in her distracted mind for something to say, and became all at once aware of the splendour of the night.

Astronomy was one of her father's favourite studies, and he had early pointed out to his children the most interesting phenomena of the heavens. Never had Joyce been so grateful to him for this as she was at that moment.

"Oh, look at Orion! Isn't he splendid to-night?" she exclaimed.

Now, George Farrar knew as little about the stars as he knew much about cotton. Beyond the fact that they differed in size, and that there was such a thing as the Milky Way, he was in almost profound ignorance. His answer, therefore, to Joyce's exclamation, was an eager wondering—

"Where, Miss Joyce—where is he?"

The storehouse of laughter lies very near to the fountain of tears, and Joyce could not help laughing as she pointed out the constellation. She drew his attention to others; keeping back thereby—hiding, as it were in the depths of the starry space—the huge black burden of her trouble. And thus she gained the Manse, without her companion guessing that she was almost wild with suppressed grief.

Never, in after-life, was there a crescent moon and the firmament brilliant with constellations, without their bringing to remembrance that miserable night.

But she dared not trust her further self-command. Saying that she did not feel quite well and was tired, she bade everybody "Good-night," and went to her room at once.

She flung herself by her bedside when she reached it. The moment had come when agony could no longer be controlled, or kept at arm's length. In its terrible strength it held her in its grip; and the bitter cry was wrung from her—

"Oh, my God, my God! How shall I ever live my life without him?"

When Bryan and Zillah reached the gate of Higher Dean Cottage, they met their mother face to face; she was in the act of unlatching it.



"I thought I heard voices," she said.

"Yes," said Zillah, after giving Bryan time to speak, of which opportunity he did not, however, avail himself; "we met with George Farrar, and he and Joyce have just gone on. He is going to see her home."

The *contretemps* which had overtaken her plans for the day had cost Mrs. Dean a very wretched evening. When Sam had made his appearance at Higher Dean without his master—she had seen him pass to the yard—she guessed at once what had happened: Bryan had gone to Undercragg. But whether it were a good omen or a bad one would depend upon what had led him thither; and this she had deputed Rebecca to ascertain.

“T’ maister’s gwon to t’ Undercragg,” said Sam, in answer to Rebecca’s query as to his whereabouts.

“Why, I didn’t think he knew as Miss Zillah was there,” said Rebecca tentatively.

“Well—but I towld him,” said Sam, with a grin, as if pleased at his own cleverness in thinking of it, “I towld him as I’d seed Miss Zillah an’ Miss J’yce fro’ t’ Chapel House, settin’ off wi’ Miss Whaite.”

“Tha did, did tha?” said Rebecca, feeling very much inclined to box Sam’s ears.

“Eea,” said Sam, with another grin, and walking off with Boxer into his stable. He had been busy unbuckling straps as he talked.

The moment Mrs. Dean saw Rebecca’s face, her worst fears were confirmed—it was all puckered with concern and vexation. Also, she was nodding her head in the manner habitual to her when anything went wrong.

“Well,” queried Mrs. Dean laconically.

“T’ young jack-a-napes towld him—everythin’,” said Rebecca.

Mrs. Dean uttered an impatient, troubled exclamation.

“I wish t’ masther would make up his mind,” said Rebecca sympathetically.

“It’s all Joyce Warwick’s doings—all,” said Mrs. Dean gloomily, and almost viciously. “He would have

been engaged to Miss Whaite, this minute, but for her."

"Ay—it's a bad job," said Rebecca.

"She'll just ruin everything, I'm afraid, in spite of us, though I have thought lately that Mr. Bryan was getting to see more with me," said Mrs. Dean; adding, "It's all her doings. Her coming home just at this juncture has been a great misfortune."

Mrs. Dean spoke vehemently; and there shone from her eyes the same look of hatred and malignity which, in those of her ancestor of long ago, had made Joyce Warwick shudder more than once that day.

"I think I should have a bit o' talk wi' him again, if I was yo', misthress," said Rebecca.

"I'm afraid of doing more harm than good," said Mrs. Dean. "Bryan has a will of his own."

"He wouldn't be a Dean if he hadn't," said Rebecca, with a funny, cackling laugh. And there the discussion had ended.

But, as I have already said, Mrs. Dean had spent a miserable evening; and she had fully made up her mind that she would again speak to her son on the subject of Agatha Whaite. When, however, Bryan and Zillah made their appearance, and she understood that the former had allowed George Farrar to escort Joyce home, her fears were not only allayed, but, by force of reaction, her hopes received an impetus, and reached a point they had never reached before. Bryan must have made up his mind to marry Agatha, or he would never have left Joyce, short of the Chapel House.

The light burnt low in the lamp, and she could not see into the recess where Bryan seated himself, and note the misery in his eyes. He often went early to bed on

market-days, unless he had called at Undercragg; and she was not surprised, therefore, that he very shortly announced his intention of doing so, and that he wanted no supper.

When he had retired, Mrs. Dean questioned Zillah upon matters; but she too was tired and sleepy, and not much could be got out of her. She did not forget, however, to take credit to herself for her foresight about the seeing Joyce home.

"And Bryan didn't seem to object?" asked Mrs. Dean anxiously.

"Very little," said Zillah. "I was surprised how little."

"I believe—I do believe," said Mrs. Dean to herself jubilantly, "that Bryan is coming to his senses at last."



CHAPTER X

A CRISIS

“'Tis one thing to be tempted, 'tis another to fall.”

—*Shakespeare.*

“On life's vast ocean diversely we sail,
Reason the card, but passion is the gale.

And hence one master passion in the breast,
Like Aaron's serpent, swallows up the rest.”—*Pope.*



HERE was a considerable difference of opinion prevailing amongst the deacons and congregation of Dean Head Chapel as to the course to be pursued in the present crisis of their affairs. Some, mostly the elder amongst them, were so rooted to the spot that they were prepared to accede to any demands, however unreasonable, on the part of the ground landlord. Others, mostly the middle-aged, were almost equally desirous of retaining the chapel, but decidedly objected to these demands, and could not believe they would continue to be made, if they held out against them. While still others, mostly the youngest of the people, considered that now was the time to make a change: to leave the old place, to build somewhere in

the valley nearer the population—make a fresh start, in fact. There were so many conflicting opinions, indeed, that it seemed impossible to arrive at a conclusion. But at a meeting of the deacons, the pastor, Mr. Warwick, had laid before them the plan for the present, suggested by Bryan Dean; it had been thoughtfully discussed, and finally Bryan's offer of his warehouse at Higher Dean Mill had been accepted, with, of course, the usual "vote of thanks."

The Sunday after the visit to Dean-Hurst, of which we have spoken in the preceding chapter, was the last on which, unless they and Captain Crimsworth could come to terms, the Church at Dean Head would ever assemble there. It was a solemn and impressive time, and the majority of the congregation looked precisely as if they were attending a funeral. Two or three old women had very red eyes, their mouths worked nervously, and from time to time they were obliged to use their pocket-handkerchiefs. Some of the old men even gave stolen dabs, when they thought no one was looking. And from both men and women might be heard to proceed sniffs of divers lengths. Mrs. Rodley's ear-trumpet shook in her hand, and she was kept uncommonly busy, poor soul, between the manipulation of that instrument and her purple-spotted pocket-handkerchief.

It was a bitterly cold day, with frozen snow on the ground, and Absalom with a very red nose, the result of combined frost and feeling, peregrinated between the chapel and the schoolhouse, where he had to keep up good fires, considerably oftener than was his wont, "lettin' in sich draughts o' cold air," as somebody grumbled afterwards, every time he softly opened the vestry door.

During the preceding week, Absalom Rodley and his wife Marinda had left the cottage, temporarily, at any-rate, where they had dwelt in peace so many years, for the land on which it stood was in the old lease. It had indeed, with an additional room, since used as a vestry, originally been the minister's house. Until matters were finally settled, room for Absalom's "bits o' things" (furniture) had been found in the Manse, and he and his wife had gone to lodge with a relative in Beck Dean. It was a terrible trial and upset for the pair, and they both felt and spoke of "waves and billows" going over their heads. Joyce Warwick, who had her own private "waves and billows," of which she could not speak, was full of sympathy for the old chapel-keeper and his wife, and had been very helpful to them during their removal. She, herself, had carefully carried the old clock into the Manse, where it now lay on a box in the attic, the old man and woman executing their manœuvres, if they moved at all, on their backs. She had helped to pack Mrs. Rodley's precious set of china, with its huge tea-pot and slop-bowl—the latter big enough for a christening-font. She had taken down, and transferred to the Manse, the brass candlesticks, the fruit-sellers, and the trays from the mantelshelf, and rendered divers other little services, besides speaking words of encouragement and comfort, from time to time, down Mrs. Rodley's ear-trumpet. And in thus ministering to others and in daily duty, teaching Jack and Jill, Joyce Warwick had found the best antidote for her own trouble—a trouble she often felt greater than she could bear.

Joyce was at chapel this memorable Sunday morning, but she sat where her eyes could not rest on Bryan Dean; and he, on his side, only saw Joyce's profile, with


its pretty ear, and little rings of shining hair above. They were both profoundly miserable; but both conscientiously strove to ignore personal feeling, and enter into the spirit of the service, and worship God in this temple of His, where possibly they might never worship again. Mr. Warwick preached a very solemn sermon, suited to the occasion, and making reference to the numbers who must have come into that earthly temple, and gone from it to the Temple "not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," during the century of its existence, pointing out that even if its mission as a building was over, Dean Head Chapel had done good and noble service. And if the temple had gone, the Church remained—"the Church whose members ought, each one, to be a temple of the Holy Spirit of Christ."

Everything is comparative, everything has a worth and an attraction extraneous to its mere appearance, everything has a sentimental value, whose current coin is generally tender association; and plain and unattractive, almost ugly as it was, the people who joined in the concluding hymn of that morning's service thought of no other building than Dean Head Chapel as they sang, some of them with tears—

"Lord of the worlds above!
How pleasant and how fair
The dwellings of Thy love,
Thine earthly temples are;
To Thine abode my heart aspires,
With warm desires to see my God."

There were those who could not join in the singing—because their hearts were too full.

"I was as near choked as I could be," said old Ezra Whixley, the thin, delicate, narrow-chested weaver,



afterwards. Utterly unfit as he was, he had braved the snow and frost, and the bitter wind, and dragged himself across Cowley Common that morning, for love of this "earthly temple."

When the service was over, there was quite a stream of folks crossing the white, slippery graveyard to the schoolhouse, nearly all the congregation having brought dinner with them—including the chapel-keeper and his wife, the latter of whom cast a tearful glance at her bare, curtainless windows, as she passed her vacated home.

Higher Dean Cottage was locked up, and all the family therefrom, including Rebecca, made their way with the rest into the schoolroom. Mrs. Dean had had many pros and cons in her mind as to this step. What would be best to do, she hardly knew. Or rather she did know that—but personal inclination and policy ran counter to each other. Though her hopes were certainly higher than they had ever been since Joyce's appearance on the scene, she still considered that she was bound to exercise vigilance.

Especially was this so, as no opportunity had since been afforded Bryan of following up the course she hoped and believed he had now marked out for himself. Either from exposure in the waggonette, or from the cold of the old, unused rooms in Dean-Hurst, Agatha Whaite had, on the day of the visit there, taken a severe chill, and was now confined to her bed with a feverish cold and quinsy. Bryan had been particularly quiet, and had seemed much depressed during the week; and Mrs. Dean tried to hope that it was from anxiety on Agatha's account. But possibly, she also told herself, his depression might arise from the resolution he had formed. She

felt instinctively that it must have been made at some cost. In any case, she dared not broach the matter, or question Bryan. There were times when her son's reserve was of a character that even she could not encroach upon, or essay to penetrate, and such had been his mood since Tuesday.

Personally, she would have preferred remaining at home to-day; for the afternoon service was not to be of the ordinary character. Instead of the usual reading of "lessons" and a sermon, there was to be a sort of experience meeting, to be followed by the administration of the Sacrament.

Member of the Church as she had been from her girlhood's days, Mrs. Dean was one of the many who, it is to be feared, have let "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches"—in her case, the pursuit and prospect of the latter—"choke the Word." She had become "unfruitful," and she knew it, and seldom indeed, of late years, had she formed one of the number who, from time to time, gathered around "The Lord's Table." And special occasion as this was, she would have evaded it, had it not been for other and worldly considerations.

A strong aroma of coffee, mingled with the fainter odour of tea, greeted the nostrils on entrance into the schoolroom; also a sound of many voices met the ear.

Mrs. Dean was told several times what a stranger she was there; with the addendum of some such remark as—

"Yo' thought yo'd have just another look at t' old spot, I reckon."

One of the deacons remarked, that it was a long time since he had seen her at the Lord's Supper—he hoped she had stayed for that, etc., etc.

But to all remarks, Mrs. Dean answered nothing—

simply meeting them with a cold, inscrutable smile, and even that was discounted by a frown between her eyes.

Still, Mrs. Dean had reason to be very content, for no word or smile, or look even, had been exchanged between Bryan and Joyce, either inside the chapel or out—of that she felt certain, for she had kept careful watch. And here was Bryan, safe by her side, not only whilst he was eating his sandwiches, but afterwards, and making no attempt to visit the Manse.

We have spoken of the afternoon gathering as being an “experience meeting,” but perhaps “reminiscence meeting” would be the better term.

One and another told what he knew of the chapel—chiefly in connection with his own family. This man’s grandfather had been a “joined member” there, from his youth up; the other man’s grandmother had joined the Church “when Mr. Sawley was the minister”; another man’s mother had “sat under” Mr. Clare for “fifty years.” “Mr. Sawley,” said one, had given them “high doctrine”; “Mr. Cawley,” said another, had given it them “strong”; and Mr. Clare had been “very dry”—so that we may very well conclude, that somebody’s “mother” must have been a long-suffering woman. Some gave interesting accounts of their own conversions at Dean Head, others of that of their fathers or friends, while others, again, touched upon their present spiritual state. And in this way, and in singing, an hour and a half swiftly passed.

Then came the most impressive part of the service—when, in small companies, the members knelt round the communion table, and partook together of the emblematic bread and wine. The Deans, the Warwicks, and the Robsons happened to form part of the same relay, and by pure accident, Robert Robson knelt by Joyce Warwick’s

side. Bryan had his head bowed, and did not see this until they were all about to rise ; but Mrs. Dean did, and it gave her more joy, I fear, than did the service in which she was engaged.

This circumstance seemed to confirm the rumour about them ; Joyce's denial of its truth, of which she knew, notwithstanding.

The last hymn that was sung was the one which is always chosen when men and women are in specially solemn mood, or in any extremity, so well does it express the appeal of weakness to Strength, of evanescence to the Enduring—of humanity to the Godhead. Voices quavered and choked, sobs broke in upon its harmonies ; but on it rolled, the grand old hymn, probably sung amongst the first in the building—

“ O God ! our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.”

A solemn benediction followed, and all streamed silently out. There was no lingering in the chapel-yard—no one was in the mood for gossip ; it was, too, nearly dark, four o'clock having struck ; so, at once—into the Manse, over the Common, down the lane—the congregation dispersed.

It was on the Thursday following that Zillah Dean, having been to pay a visit to her sick friend, returned with a piece of information of great importance indeed, namely, that Mr. Whaite had become possessed of Dean-Hurst.

It had come about suddenly. Captain Crimsworth, who was in great straits for money, had sold it to him for an additional few hundreds to the amount of his mortgage.

"Agatha is in great glee about it," said Zillah; "indeed, it is she who has persuaded her father to buy it. I believe it has done her far more good than the doctor's medicine. I found her downstairs again."

Zillah had not gone by invitation to Undercragg; and Sam had driven her there and brought her back.

"Why didn't you stay, when you found Agatha better?" asked politic Mrs. Dean—the two were alone. "Then, perhaps, Bryan would have fetched you."

"I don't think Agatha wanted me to—particularly," said Zillah. "She doesn't look quite herself yet; and I think she would rather Bryan didn't see her, till she does. She kept saying to me, what 'a fright' she was."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Mrs. Dean, with a grim smile.

"I believe so," said Zillah. "I have never heard her say so much about her own looks before. I have always thought she was very well satisfied with herself. But—do you know, mother—I believe—I feel sure—she is jealous of Joyce."

The smile on Mrs. Dean's face faded.

"Was there anything else to make you think so?" she inquired.

"Well," said Zillah, "she asked me if I saw a great deal of her, and if she came much here, and things of that kind. But it was her manner, when she spoke about her, more than anything, which made me think she was jealous."

"I've been afraid of doing mischief—but I must speak to Bryan again. I think he has given Joyce up—he never even spoke to her on Sunday; but I shall tell him that he must really come to the point with Agatha. Don't say anything at tea-time of this news. I will tell him myself afterwards, and have a serious talk with him."

But "the best laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft a-gley," and Bryan, who was moody and distrait at tea, as he had been mostly for more than a week past, disappeared immediately after that meal,—his mother thought at first that he had merely gone back into the office,—and was not seen again until quite late, when he came in wet through, and was obliged to go to bed at once. He had had no special errand there,—none at all in fact,—but he had been rambling over Royden Edge, trying to walk off his restlessness and wretchedness, and had been overtaken by heavy rain. Mrs. Dean carried him up a cup of hot coffee, with the intention of broaching the important subject with which she was bursting; but Bryan looked so tired and miserable that she dared not. Hard as it was for her, she was compelled to come to the conclusion that her talk with him must be deferred.

The following day Bryan went as usual to Baleborough—though he was scarcely fit to go, having evidently taken cold from his wetting. On his return he drew his chair up to the fire, a little larger one than usual, and every few minutes he shivered. His mother watched him with keen anxiety on several accounts. They were alone together, for Zillah had gone to tea to Edge House.

"They have brought the reading-desk and the remainder of the forms down from Dean Head to-day, I suppose?" asked Bryan of Rebecca, when she brought in the tea.

"Ay," she said, "Ambrose has been 'as busy as Trap's wife,' all day, bringin' 'em, an' settin' 'em—it's not long sin' t' last lot came. An' Marinda's been helpin' him, an' all."

"Poor Mrs. Rodley," said Bryan sympathetically. "I

daresay she feels it hard lines to be turned out of her house."

"She does that," said Rebecca earnestly; "sho's just like a feesh out o' watter, off t' Dean Head."

"Well," said Bryan, "perhaps she'll get back again—I hope she will. At anyrate, she'll not be in suspense long. I've heard to-day that Captain Crimsworth is coming to his place for Christmas."

"The Lord be praised!" exclaimed Rebecca, "and give him a reasonable mind."

The table was cleared, the hearth swept, the light in the lamp turned a little higher,—it had been turned down during tea,—and Bryan, drawing near to the fire again and taking up a book, began to read. Mrs. Dean resumed her usual knitting-work, seated on the opposite side of the hearth. She noted that her son got on very poorly with his reading, and that occasionally he still shivered and yawned.

"Bryan," she said anxiously, by and by, "you don't seem a bit well."

"I don't feel very first-rate, mother," he said. "I shall not be long out of bed."

This speech roused Mrs. Dean to a sense that time was going, and she had her self-imposed task yet to do. She shrank from it in an unaccountable manner. A hardly recognised sense that she was about to throw the last die was probably at the root of her reluctance. Still, it must be done, and she would never have a more favourable opportunity.

"Bryan," she began, as a leading question, screwing up her courage, dropping her knitting on her lap, and gazing at him earnestly, with her deep, dark, keen eyes, "who told you that Captain Crimsworth was coming back at Christmas?"

Bryan started slightly, and from over his book, which he did not lower, answered laconically, to Mrs. Dean's utter surprise—

“Mr. Whaite.”

“Mr. Whaite?” echoed his mother.

“Yes,” said Bryan; “we travelled from Baleborough together.”

Mrs. Dean caught her breath. There was a dead silence—not even a cinder fell to break it. But the hearts of both beat rapidly within them—each knew that a crisis had arrived.

“Then,” said Mrs. Dean breathlessly, at length, “he would tell you something else.”

“Yes,” said Bryan, as calmly as he could, “the two things are connected. Captain Crimsworth could not come home, it appears, until he had raised some money; and—Mr. Whaite has found it for him—but only on condition that he should possess himself of Dean-Hurst.”

“He told you that?” asked Mrs. Dean. Bryan knew more than she did, it appeared—possibly more than Agatha knew.

“Yes,” said Bryan. He had dropped his book by this time, and leaned well forward towards the fire; so that his eyes were still hidden from his mother.

“Anything more?” she asked. “Did he say anything else?” In the eagerness of her manner as she put these questions—the nervous quivering of the hard mouth, the quick, keen glance of the eyes, the hands knotted together—was betrayed her hunger for the answer—her anticipation of what it would be.

“Yes,” said Bryan—the words falling from his lips reluctantly, as it were, and a great shiver passing through his body; “Mr. Whaite told me that—that he was going to settle the Dean-Hurst estate on Agatha.”

"At once—now?" asked Mrs. Dean, scarcely able to retain her seat in her excitement.

"At once—as 'a deed of gift,'" responded Bryan, with another shiver.

"At last! At last! O Bryan!" cried his mother, dropping on the hearthrug at his feet, and clasping his knees; "that means that Dean-Hurst is ours—yours! Mr. Whaite could only tell you all this with a purpose—you know what?"

Bryan had no negative for the latter part of this speech. He had not told his mother of circumstances which could leave no doubt on his own mind as to Mr. Whaite's wishes in the matter. He had evidently fully adopted those of his daughter; and had told his story, with hints broad enough to be apprehended by the densest brain and the least conceited mind. He had also, beforehand, secured a carriage for themselves, that their confidences might not be interrupted.

But he—Bryan—had something positive to say with regard to the former part of his mother's assertions—something which, he was conscious, would be terribly hard for her to hear. He raised her tenderly, with an expostulatory exclamation, placed her again in her chair, and stood before her like a culprit—though it was his innate manliness which had brought him, through strong temptation, into his present position.

"I am very sorry—very, very sorry, mother," he said, "to disappoint you in this. But—I am afraid we are as far off as ever from the possession of Dean-Hurst—for—I cannot marry Agatha Whaite."

A spasm, which made it look almost ghastly, crossed Mrs. Dean's face, and her eyes seemed positively to blaze. She tried to speak, but words would not come.

Bryan felt deeply for her—he moved to her side, and placed his hand caressingly on her shoulder; but she shook him off fiercely. It was a bitter moment for the young man; but he stood his ground bravely.

“I have coveted Dean-Hurst,” he said: “I want it now, mother, myself, perhaps as much as you want it for me. And it has cost me—but no, I’ll say nothing about that”—he was thinking of the love of Joyce—“but I will not forswear myself—I will not sell my soul—even for Dean-Hurst. The bait has been a tempting one, and has allured me for awhile, to my hurt; but I have put it aside now, thank God!—and for ever, I hope.”

“What do you mean by forswearing yourself?” cried Mrs. Dean passionately, by a great effort finding voice.

“Oh, mother, you surely know,” said poor Bryan, bowing his head on the back of her chair, and his voice betraying his mental suffering. “I love one woman, to the very depths of my soul; and shall I go to another with a lie on my lips, and ask her to be my wife? Never!”

“It’s Joyce—it’s Joyce Warwick who is at the bottom of all this. I knew how it would be from the first.”

These words were uttered in such thick, agitated tones, that they were barely distinguishable; but Bryan caught their drift.

“Don’t blame Joyce, mother,” he said; “she”—But he could not utter another word just then. He recovered himself in a minute however, and went on to say—

“If even I were heart-whole, I do not think Agatha Whaite would ever win it, mother; so be satisfied. And if you will—go on saving in the old way.”

Mrs. Dean sprang to her feet and faced her son. She was almost beside herself with disappointment and anger.

“And do you suppose,” she burst out—“do you



Do you
imagine
for a minute
that Agatha Whaite
would sell Dean Hurst to you?"

imagine for a minute that Agatha Whaite would *sell* Dean-Hurst to *you*, Bryan Dean? I tell you, you are further from its possession than you have ever been in your life. It will be for ever an impossibility to buy it. If you had the money, twice-told, to lay at her feet, you would not get it. Agatha Whaite wanted it, and wanted it for you; but she expected to share it. She'll never give it up, without herself with it, you may depend!"

Mrs. Dean had found voice indeed now—the words seemed to fly from her lips, in her passion.

"I blame myself very much," said poor Bryan humbly, "that I have ever raised your hopes at all in—in that direction, mother. I am very sorry if any attentions of mine have misled Agatha Whaite. I don't think I have gone very far"—

"You have gone so far that you have no business"—

"O Bryan," she cried, with a wail in her voice, leaving her sentence unfinished, "do consider what you are doing! You are throwing away your last chance—and—and—you are breaking my heart!"

"Don't say that, mother," cried Bryan, shivering so much that he shook the chair he leant upon. "I cannot bear it!"

"You don't care anything about your mother!" she continued, her passion blinding her to her son's condition. "O Bryan, unsay what you have said. At anyrate, say you will think further about it. You"—

"Mother—it is of no use—I have made up my mind," said Bryan. "Don't dissuade me—don't try to dissuade me from that which is right. What is right must be best, even if we suffer for it."

He was afraid of himself and of his mother's pleadings. As before, that day the temptation presented itself, that

since Joyce was lost to him, he might as well close in with Mr. Whaite's offer, or what was practically such, and make his mother happy.

"But, mother," he went on, breaking in upon another passionate appeal, "I really must go to bed—I—don't feel well. Perhaps you or Rebecca will bring me a hot bottle—my feet are cold;" and with a "Good-night," Bryan almost staggered out of the room.

His mother sank into her chair, covered her face with her hands, and moaned aloud. With the hope of her life lost—blotted out—extinguished, as the sun of that life's horizon, she indeed walked in darkness.

But what Mrs. Dean was most conscious of, both in her dumb despair and the fierce fighting against fact, which alternated in her breast, was a feeling of bitter, malignant hatred of her who was, she considered, responsible for this miscarrying of her plans—poor, unhappy Joyce Warwick.



CHAPTER XI

A CATASTROPHE

“Ambition, like a torrent, ne’er looks back—
 Being both a rebel,
 Unto the soul and reason, and enforceth
 All laws, all conscience, treads upon religion,
 And offereth violence to Nature’s self.”—*Ben Jonson.*

“None have accused thee, ’tis thy conscience cries,
 The witness in the soul that never dies.”—*Mrs. Hale.*



IT was a bitterly cold morning—the wind blowing from the north, and thick clouds, presumably charged with snow, hanging over and touching Hawk’s Moor—which dawned upon the inhabitants of Beck Dean and neighbourhood the following Sunday. Many of the people who would have long distances to go to service, on looking out of their windows shook their heads, shrugged their shoulders, and walked back to the fire; and amongst these were many Dean Head folk—the Robsons (Joyce had given Robert the cold shoulder), old Ezra Whixley, the Farrars, except George, etc. It was far enough, in all conscience, to the chapel, but fully a mile and a quarter farther to Higher Dean Mill; and with snow threatening to fall at any time, and the roads slippery,

and only for one service—well—it was “not worth while,” “it was risky,” “it would be more sensible to read our Bibles at home.”

Of course for a few—but they were comparatively few—Higher Dean was nearer.

At first, when she knew of it, Mrs. Dean had been very angry with Bryan about his offer of the mill warehouse—for private reasons of her own, easily guessed; but since she had learnt that it was only proposed to hold one service there in the mornings, and two or three small cottage meetings, on the hillsides, in the afternoons or evenings; and that, consequently, there would be no staying for dinner, with its attendant heating of water, unwelcome visitors into her house, and possible opportunities for love-making—she had become more reconciled to the arrangement. And now that the time had come, her mind was in too great a turmoil to care about the matter in one way or another. She was as one vainly beating against the bars of a prison-house—her strong, uncontrollable will fighting against circumstances—the uselessness—the impotency of it—well-nigh maddening her.

Bryan himself was *hors de combat*, mind and body. His loss of Joyce; his loss—practically—of Dean Hurst, since not attainable with honour and self-respect; his conflict with his mother, and, added to all this, the severe chill he had taken, had utterly prostrated him. On the Saturday he had not been fit to leave his bed, and Sunday morning found him in the same condition. He had given directions that a good fire was to be lighted early in the stove of the warehouse, and all made as comfortable as possible; but he had not been able to see to anything himself. He could hear from his room the pattering of small feet on the pavement beyond the garden, when,

soon after nine, the school children began to assemble for an hour's teaching before service-time. Not many came, however, owing to the distances they would have to traverse, and the severe weather. In due time he heard the elders pass, and wondered if Joyce were amongst them,—perhaps with Robert Robson by her side,—and then he fell into a troubled, half-conscious doze, the thought of Joyce ever present with him.

Meantime the congregation, including the children, numbering, perhaps, some sixty, had assembled in the warehouse. This building was beyond both the house and the mill; and the upper storey in which service was being held, was approached by a wooden staircase outside the building itself. This staircase was of comparatively recent date, having taken the place of an old and much-worn stone stairway inside the building. The latter had been boarded over, but a trap-door had been placed, or left in the floor, giving access to it, and it was sometimes used as cellarage for odd things.

It is requisite to note these details, for the right understanding of what happened afterwards. There was another door in the room besides that from the staircase; it was quite at the opposite end, and communicated with what was known as "the wool-chamber," which lay between the warehouse and the mills. There was still a third door, a larger one, in the right-hand wall on entering; but this only opened into space, and was used for the goods, which by means of a crane or teagle were raised into it. To-day, of course, it was fast barred. A long counter, partly laden with woollen "pieces," occupied a good portion of the same wall; and the left of the room was also occupied with piles and bales of goods—blankets, flannels, kerseys, etc. etc. There were plain, oblong

windows on both sides of the warehouse. In the middle of the room, a long oblong had been cleared, and here Absalom Rodley had ranged the forms. At the upper end, in the left-hand corner, he had placed the school superintendent's desk, as a rostrum for Mr. Warwick. In the right-hand corner was the door into the wool-chamber, of which I have already spoken. In the midst of the oblong space stood the stove, from which rose, in primitive fashion, a long thick iron or tin pipe for the conveyance of the smoke. Both stove and pipe were rusty-red in colour ; and in the former burnt a hot, fierce fire, which warmed those near it almost too well, but which failed to raise the temperature of the room, generally, to quite a comfortable degree.

Lack of space forbids my entering into many particulars of this service. Suffice it to say, then, that hymns, lessons, and sermon all indicated and interpreted the mixed feelings of the men and women assembled there. They began by singing—

“ Welcome, sweet day of rest ” ;

but afterwards joined in the words of struggling belief, buffeted by the waves of difficulty—

“ God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform ” ;

and, later, exhorted each other to—

“ Commit thou all thy griefs
And ways into His hands,
To His sure truth and tender care,
Who earth and heaven commands.”

And for one of the lessons Mr. Warwick read Psalm cxxi., commencing : “ I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.”

Joyce Warwick had hesitated greatly about coming to the service at Higher Dean; and only a sense of duty had brought her there. She felt that her private sorrow ought not to make her absent herself from the public worship of God; even though that sorrow would be accentuated by her presence at that particular place of worship, and her consequent contact with Bryan Dean. Another reason for her decision lay in the fact that both her mother and Maud declined going out, and that Jack and Jill, on the other hand, insisted upon going to the service. Held in a warehouse, it would be a new experience; and novelty is dear to the child-mind.

Joyce had therefore brought them there—to the Sunday school in the first instance;—and now sat with Jill—Jack was seated close by his father—near to the door of the wool-chamber.

It had been a relief to find that Bryan was not present, though she was sorry to hear from Zillah that he was ailing. She had exchanged no word with him since she had refused his love; and she felt afraid of herself, lest, when she came to do so, she should betray, in broad daylight, what night had helped her to conceal, namely, her own feeling for him. She was thankful, therefore, that the meeting was deferred, hoping that in time she would be better able to undergo the ordeal. She felt wonderfully comforted too, as the service went on. She felt, to a degree she never had done before, that she *could* “Commit all her griefs and ways into His hands,” who was her loving Father, though there was, as there had always been since that Thursday night, more than a week ago, an undercurrent of doubt in her mind as to the wisdom, and even the righteousness of the course she had taken. She had led Bryan to believe that which was not

true. Had she been justified in doing it—even for his good—his material prosperity?

Just as Mr. Warwick began his sermon, a few of his hearers, amongst them Joyce, fancied they noticed a smell of burning, amongst the other smells in the room—those of wool, oil, and brimstone, the latter used in the stoving of blankets. Some said, afterwards, that they detected it even earlier, but they attributed it to the great heat of the stove and stove-pipe. Also, no one liked to speak of it, and thus interrupt the minister. He himself, as a few persons are found to be, was almost destitute of the sense of smell.

At length, however, a man who was sitting near Joyce perceived smoke issuing from the top of the wool-chamber door, and, senselessly enough, opened it. The room proved to be full of dense smoke, which rolled into the warehouse in a volume, and filled it almost in an instant. And, worse than this, the draught made by the opened door caused a tongue of fire instantaneously to leap up just within, which so frightened the man, that he, momentarily losing his presence of mind, and falling back from it, lost his only chance of shutting the door again,—at anyrate he did not do it,—and thus cutting off, for a short time at anyrate, the choking smoke. The wool, indeed, had hitherto done little more than smoulder; now, however, fanned by the air, it burst into flame in several places.

There was, as you may imagine, an instantaneous panic amongst the people, who were, a moment before, sitting peacefully listening to the minister's discourse. He had been preaching about the mysteries of Providence, and the need and privilege of the Christian to lean upon the strong arm of God in all difficulty and danger; and here, in an instant, they found themselves in peril.

There was plenty of time to escape from the fire, if they could run the gauntlet of the smoke,—the blinding, suffocating smoke,—but that confused everybody; and the benches, placed with so much care by Absalom Rodley, impeded their progress to the stair-head. Absalom managed to get there, however, amongst the first,—Marinda had not come,—and he busied himself helping people down, and preventing a block, and consequent catastrophe there. Others did the same, amongst them George Farrar, who first of all saw to Zillah's safety.

Joyce Warwick, with a cry of dismay on seeing the fire, seized Jill by the hand, and feeling half-suffocated, tried to grope her way towards the door; but someone or more, rushing past, separated the two.

As it fortunately happened, the child Jill was almost swept into the arms of her father, who was breathlessly steering himself and Jack through the dense smoke. But Joyce did not, could not see this.

"Jill! Jill!" she cried, in faint, choked accents—the result of smoke and fearful anguish. "Where are you? oh, where are you?" And she lingered and groped about for her. The child did not hear; neither did the father, for they had hurried on. Also, there were other anguished voices calling for loved ones.

But someone heard her—one—and the only one in the wide world who hated Joyce, namely, Mrs. Dean. And at the sound, Satan entered into her heart.

Evil thoughts had wholly possessed her before, making her oblivious of outward things, or she would long since herself, in all probability, have smelt the burning wool. She had been sitting a little way behind Joyce, and was now feeling her way, like the rest, to the head of the stairs, when her foot touched the iron ring in the floor

by means of which the trap-door opening on to the old disused stone steps was raised. She knew well what lay beneath, for the outer stairway replacing this had been erected since her coming to Dean-Hurst.

The voice of Joyce, immediately behind, reached her ears at the self-same moment. A temptation assailed her—sudden, swift, powerful, and, in her then frame of mind, irresistible.

“Get rid of Joyce,” whispered the enemy of her soul, “and all may be well; for time works wonders. But now or never!”

Scarcely for a breath’s space did Mrs. Dean parry with the tempter. There was no time. “Now or never!” echoed through her soul. Her fatal ambition for herself and Bryan, her iron will, her hatred of Joyce who had crossed it, culminated; and exerting all her strength for the purpose, Mrs. Dean deliberately raised the trap-door, leaving—what in the smoke-laden atmosphere was undistinguishable from the solid floor—a yawning gulf almost at Joyce’s feet. She then went on herself; but spent with the exertion, for the door was heavy, choked with the smoke, and with her heart beating wildly in consequence of what she had done, she staggered against the end wall. As she touched it, the sound of a falling body and a smothered cry reached her. She had effected her purpose.

Then the appalling thought struck her, that others might fall down the breach. But she had no strength left to go back and close down the door. Besides, that would never do; that would disclose design, whereas now it would be conjectured that someone had opened it with an idea of escaping that way; someone ignorant of the fact that the doorway at the bottom had been built up.

Mustering all her strength therefore, Mrs. Dean called out to all and sundry—not many now—who might be left in the room—



“Creep on the floor, and keep to the right.”

On all-fours, an extended hand would give warning of danger, had been her quick thought.

But she had opened her ear to the voice of conscience regarding the danger to others, and it began to speak in

tones of thunder about what she had done to Joyce Warwick. Momentarily drowned by the force of the temptation, that voice was relentless now, and spoke in plain terms, and dubbed her "Murderer!" And what was this coming upon her, arresting her steps when she should be seeking safety in flight? The exertion of raising the heavy trap-door, the tumultuous beating of her heart from the unwonted mental excitement, the speaking in that awful atmosphere, were, combined, too much for her. The room seemed to spin round, she vainly tried to cling to the wall for support, she gasped for breath, and sank in a heap on the floor in the angle formed by the front and end wall of the warehouse. And none but the great Being, whose law she had broken, heard, as she fell, the cry wrung from her heart and lips, in her remorse and mortal fear—

"God be merciful to me, a sinner!"



CHAPTER XII. AND LAST

RESCUE

“An universal horror
Struck through my eyes and chill’d my very heart.”—*Howe*.

“Say what is honour? ’Tis the finest sense
Of justice, which the human mind can frame,
Interest, each lurking frailty, to disclaim,
And guard the way of life from all offence
Suffer’d or done.”—*Wordsworth*.



HE left Bryan Dean in his bed, lying there ill and dozing. From this condition he fell into one of light slumber and dreaming. While half-asleep he had been thinking of Joyce Warwick, and now his dreams were of her. She seemed to be always threatened with some danger; now it was storm and tempest, then it was flood, and again a tearing wolf which menaced her. He, on his side, was always striving to reach her, that he might help and succour her; but ever some power held him back. In the last dream, however, so near was the wolf to her, so visible its fangs, so audible its feet, that Bryan broke, as it were, from his invisible bonds, and springing to her aid, found himself lying across the bed, wide awake. His

dream had been so vivid, that his heart was beating fast from the excitement of it, and he lay a moment wondering and collecting his thoughts.

But there was a sound of running feet in reality—human feet—and clamour and confusion in the air. What had happened?

Bryan sprang off the bed, and looked through the window. The space outside the garden and the mill-yard was, he found, filled with men, women, and children; smoke was issuing from some part of the mill or warehouse; and men were busy manipulating hose-pipes.

“My God!” cried Bryan, “there is a fire!”

Forgetting all his bodily aches and pains, Bryan was dressed—in a fashion—in about two minutes, and, in dressing-gown and slippers, rushed downstairs and out at the front door. At the gate he met Mr. Warwick. His face showed ghastly white through a coating of smoke-grime, his body was trembling all over, and his lips quivered piteously as he gasped—

“I—I was coming to you, Mr. Bryan. I—we—cannot find your mother anywhere—nor—my—Joyce.”

“Oh, my God!” exclaimed Bryan again, dashing past the minister, rushing like a madman through the crowd, and leaping up the stairs.

One glance showed him that nothing could be done until the ingress of the smoke and on-coming fire were stopped; and to accomplish that, he must have help. He flew downstairs and called for three or four volunteers to assist him to block up the doorway between the warehouse and the wool-chamber; for, so far, there being nothing within its reach in the former, and the door-jambs being of stone, the fire was confined

to the latter room. Half a dozen came—amongst them Mr. Warwick, who had followed fast on Bryan's heels.

"No, no," cried Bryan to him, "you must not come. You cannot lift and push bales of goods."

It was a perilous undertaking to brave that suffocating atmosphere ; but the men put their will into it, and they dragged and pushed and lifted, in the very face of the fire which scorched them, until the aperture was blocked. Then Bryan, more dead than alive, just managed to take away the bar of the large door, and he and another pulled it back ; and then they all reeled and fell on the floor. But the fresh, blessed air revived them shortly, and soon too made a marked difference in the density of the smoke.

Bryan was the first to recover. He gave rapid directions to one of the men to let down another by the crane—the one below to send up buckets of water, to be poured upon the bales of blankets and flannels just piled up. This would employ three of the men : of the other two, Bryan begged that, as soon as they were able, they would assist in the search which he himself now began. The atmosphere was still very thick, though much relieved ; and Bryan moved carefully about, on hands and knees, in his sickening exploration. By and by, to his astonishment, he saw a gap in the floor in front of him. For an instant he paused in bewilderment ; then he thought he knew what it would be—somebody, in the confusion, had opened the trap-door ! Was it possible that his mother and Joyce had fallen down there ?

It was a moment of the most intense anguish when the thought first flashed into his mind ; then, instantly, it occurred to him that the atmosphere down below would be far less deadly than in the room. But suppose the fall had killed them !

Bryan occasionally indulged in a cigar, and he now felt in one of his pockets for a box of "wax vestas" which he usually carried there. He found it, struck one of the matches, and by its feeble light steered himself to the top of the worn steps. The light went out, and he struck another and peered into the depths below; but it did not penetrate far enough. He struck yet a third, and made his way carefully down amid oil-cans, brushes, and litter of various descriptions standing and lying on the hollow, worn steps. This time he was rewarded—both by sight and sound; somebody lay there, at the bottom of the steps—somebody who still lived, for a low moan greeted his ears. He struck another match, and bent low over the body:

It was Joyce!

With an exclamation, at once of anguish and relief, and with an unuttered but fervent prayer to God for help, Bryan sat down on one of the steps and drew Joyce up into his arms—at present he was powerless to do more. Where—how—how much she was hurt, he could not see; but she lived—thank God, she lived!

In his joy that this was so,—in his half-delirious state of mind and half-stupefied condition of body,—Bryan momentarily lost sight of the fact that Joyce did not belong to him; and he clasped her close, and called her by almost every endearing term in the vocabulary, adjuring her to speak to him. And eventually his appeals must have reached her brain; for, by and by, Joyce half opened her eyes, and sighed more than said the one word—

"Bryan!"

But now that Joyce could speak, Bryan was speechless—partly from emotion, and partly from awakening

consciousness of the fact I have just mentioned. Still he held her as before—mustering his own strength, waiting until the air of the room was a little better, that he might carry her into the cottage.

“Bryan!” again fell from the lips of Joyce, and this time in rather stronger accents, “Bryan—I—think—I believe—I—am dying!”

“God forbid!” ejaculated Bryan, with a shudder.

“Don’t say that,” gasped Joyce; “I would rather die. But—I—would like you to know that—that I love you—dearly—dearly,” she repeated, in a voice half a moan; “I cannot die—with—with a lie on my soul. I—wanted—you to have Dean-Hurst—that was—why. You—will—think of—me—sometimes, when—you are happy there.”

There was a long pause after this somewhat disjointed explanation, Bryan convulsively clasping Joyce closer to his breast, utterly unable to speak a word, from the tumult of joy and anguish within him.

Once more Joyce spoke—

“Bryan—kiss me!”

Faint but distinct fell these words on Bryan’s ears; and raising the dear head of Joyce from his shoulder, he imprinted a long, tender kiss on the trembling lips which met his. That kiss gave Bryan renewed life—energy—mental and physical strength. Joyce loved him! Please God, Joyce should not die—must not die! He, Bryan, would save her yet!

A mighty cheer, a shout of joy rent the air, when, a minute or two afterwards, Bryan Dean emerged from the wooden stairway, bearing in his arms Joyce Warwick—for he passed the word at once that she was living.

Her golden curls were tossed on his shoulder—her face was partly hidden there ; one arm hung helpless, broken, at her side ; and she had lapsed into unconsciousness again ; but—

“She is living, Mr. Warwick, and, please God, will live,” said Bryan huskily, in reply to the father’s appealing look. “Find Sam, will you,” he continued, “and tell him to saddle Boxer, and fly to Beck Foot for a doctor—two—all he can find !”

“And your mother ?” asked Mr. Warwick, now partially relieved from anxiety on his daughter’s account.

“Is she not found yet ?” asked Bryan, staggering as if he had received a blow.

“I believe not,” said Mr. Warwick sadly.

Bryan had reached the garden gate now, where Zillah was standing, wringing her hands.

“Come !” he said to her ; and he carried Joyce indoors, and laid her on the sofa in the sitting-room. “Attend to her, for me, Zillah ; and I will go now and—look for—mother,” he said, brokenly.

But there was no need for him to mount the stairs again. At the bottom he met two men—one of them George Farrar, bearing his mother’s body between them. She was apparently dead : her face showed white through the smoke-grime, her lips were livid, her swollen tongue, livid also, protruded between them. She was a ghastly object indeed, and Bryan sickened at the sight. He could afford no help now—he could only, staggering as he went, lead the way into the house, and upstairs into his mother’s room. There they laid her on the bed ; and Rebecca and a woman of the congregation, assisted by Bryan, did what they could to restore respiration.

The woman in question had formerly lived in a

colliery village, and had often seen men brought up from the mines, suffering from choke-damp, after an explosion. They had looked very much as Mrs. Dean looked, she said—and yet they recovered. She took the direction of affairs, knowing what was generally done in such cases; but it was all to no purpose. Mrs. Dean had a weak heart and it had been overstrained; and she had lain in that suffocating atmosphere too long. When the doctor came, he pronounced her dead. And Mr. Warwick knelt with the stricken Bryan and Zillah, and commended her soul to her Maker,—little thinking that it was the soul of a murderer—in intent—and that too of his own beloved child,—and asked for the son and daughter His comfort and grace.

The fire, meantime, had by vigorous measures been extinguished, having been confined to the one room. How it had originated was never made quite clear. Sam had had some difficulty in making the stove-fire burn, in the first instance, and acknowledged to having gone into the next room in search of additional fuel, candle in hand, for it was not quite light. And one of the school lads, fired with boyish curiosity, had been seen to steal into the said room also; and he was a lad seldom without matches in his pocket. The blame therefore lay between these two, but could be affixed to neither with certainty.

As for the open trap-door, nobody seemed to know anything about that, and the inquiries were not very rigorously prosecuted. An awful thought would sometimes present itself to Bryan; but his very soul cried out against it, and he put it from him. And however it might have been, his mother's Judge was also her Redeemer, and "He knew what sore temptation was."

.

And the merciful hand of Time has softened this tragic sorrow, and Bryan Dean has become a happy man. For Joyce, though many months an invalid and crippled, did not die, but became her own bright, winsome self again, and has now been Bryan's wife for several years—every year seeming to unite the pair in closer, more loving bonds. Zillah married George Farrar a few months before Bryan and Joyce were married, and they still have their little quarrels.

Captain Crimsworth, my readers will be glad to hear, either moved to compassion by reason of the catastrophe at their temporary place of worship, or put into a good humour by being himself temporarily in funds, granted to the people of Dean Head a fresh lease of their land on something like reasonable terms—sixty per cent. advance, instead of a hundred; reasonableness, it will be perceived, being like many other things—comparative.

Mr. Warwick still occupies the Manse, and Absalom Rodley the cottage. Joyce's children often go in to the latter, to see the little man and woman at the top of the clock, and to stare gravely at Marinda and her ear-trumpet. Young Bryan more than once has attempted to blow into it, under the impression that it is a musical instrument; the said Marinda confiding to all and sundry, that in the wide world there are no children to equal Joyce's. She almost envies her sister Rebecca, who has the privilege of living amongst them. Maud Warwick is married to a Londoner, and is seldom seen at Dean Head. Mrs. Warwick, I ought to say, highly approved of Joyce's marriage. Jack spends Saturday afternoon and Sunday at home, but during the week is at Baleborough, where he has gone to business; so generally there is only Jill there, now grown into a beautiful young lady.

Agatha Whaite occupies Dean-Hurst, so far, in a state of single-blessedness. Her father is dead, and Lower Dean Mills have been taken over by a "company." It has been a terrible disappointment to her—the failure of her romantic and yet self-seeking scheme; and at first, when she went to live at Dean-Hurst, she spent hours in a week gazing upon the old portraits, and thinking of what might have been. But though she would scarcely miss it—she is so rich—it never occurs to her to transfer the property to the descendants of its ancient possessors. Her friendship with Zillah has lapsed, and Joyce and Bryan seldom see her; though the latter still passes the old place, as usual, two or three times every week.

Bryan Dean is still comparatively a poor man, and has small hopes of ever coming into possession of Dean-Hurst. But that fact no longer troubles him; he considers it well-lost—for conscience', for honour, for sweet Joyce's sake.

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